

Oriental Bird Club



Bulletin 38

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December 2003

The Oriental Bird Club aims to:

■ encourage an interest
in the birds of the
Oriental Region and
their conservation

■ liaise with and
promote the work of
existing regional
societies

■ collate and publish
material on
Oriental birds

Two bulletins and a journal,
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Membership of OBC

Membership of the Club is open to all and costs £15 per annum (£10 reduced rate for nationals living in Oriental countries who cannot afford the full rate), £20 Family, £25 Supporting Member (funding one Oriental member in addition to ordinary membership), £25 Libraries and academic institutions, and £45 Business Supporters. Special arrangements for payment exist in USA, Thailand and India. To join or for further details please contact the Membership Secretary, Oriental Bird Club, P.O. Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, UK.

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OBC Web Site

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Gurney's Pitta *Pitta Gurneyi* by Kanit Khanikul.



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Letter from the Chairman

Nigel Collar

Council roles and responsibilities

At the 2002 AGM, former Chairman Paul Jepson suggested that as a matter of public information it would be helpful if Council would provide the membership with our individual profiles. After all, the membership elects Council—so who are these people who devote themselves to the Club and take so many decisions over its fate? It is a fair point, and this information will be permanently posted on the OBC website. However, not everyone has access to the web, so from time to time we will feature the Council in the Bulletin as well.

In this my last letter I introduce the lot of us, along with what our roles are and what qualifications, if any, we bring to the positions we hold; but I must first make it plain that the fundamental qualification for serving on Council, in whatever role, is *enthusiasm* and the willingness to spend much of your free time working on behalf of the Club and its objectives. It helps to be competent and efficient, and it may well help to have a qualification or experience related to the position in question, but so long as you *want* to do the job the chances are that you can. Voluntary means willing, and willing means keen; and with that—only excepting the positions of Treasurer and (if occupied) Assistant Treasurer, and perhaps also the Internet Officer, which really do require some technical knowledge—you are 99% of the way there. If nothing else, I hope this trip round the Council will inspire some of you to decide that you would like to help the Club out. Any member is eligible for Council; we have two vacancies right now (Membership Development and Publicity Officers), next year there may be several further opportunities, and we can *always* do with extra help in the finance team.

However, fun though much of it is, I should stress that Council *is*, ultimately, a serious business. Council members are trustees of the Club and have formal responsibilities to safeguard it under UK charity law. In the outline of Council positions below, some are labelled as 'officers'; however, in line with recommendations by the UK Charities Commission, OBC has adopted a constitution that requires us to appoint three *executive* officers—Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer. These positions carry no special rights,

privileges or authority; but they do have some specific duties and (unlike other Council positions) they have a five-year time-limit. Otherwise, however, we have the flexibility to nominate any other Council roles we wish. This flexibility is exemplified by the current status of Senior Editor *Forktail*. Formerly this was a Council position, but the current incumbent declines Council membership and we are entirely happy with this. On the other hand, the Assistant Bulletin Editor expressed the wish to serve on Council, and we have recently also had an Assistant Treasurer. On occasions some roles are 'doubled up', with one person having the skills, time and willingness to carry out duties which in other circumstances would be filled by two (or more) people. Moreover, we have other expert help at hand, since we can call on members of the Club and colleagues for legal and other specialist advice (such as tax law). This help is given freely and unstintingly. An effective unpaid organisation must always put such flexibility at its core and take advantage of the skills and knowledge that have been volunteered at any given time.

The following list is in alphabetical order of family names; for foreign readers, RSPB stands for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; and all indications of residence refer to England.

Please note that the date on which members were elected to Council refers to the year in which they started their duties, for example a person 'elected 2002' was nominated and approved at the Club Annual General Meeting in December 2001. The Constitution empowers Council to co-opt new members at any time during the year. Co-opted members must then be approved at the following AGM.

Tim Allwood took over as **Bulletin Editor** late in 2000, was co-opted on to Council early in 2001 and elected 2002. The job here is to coordinate the timely production of the Bulletin, and more specifically to liaise with authors, photographers, the assistant editor, designer, printer and various others, to solicit and collate relevant material, and to edit pieces into shape. Ornithological and editing skills are an advantage and an eye for a good sentence helps oil the wheels. Tim has birded around the world, including two years as

a resident of Indonesia, where he developed his passion for the Orient. He worked with the RSPB and Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust in the UK, and overseas as a teacher of English as a foreign language, before taking up his current job as a science teacher in a secondary school in Norfolk.

Phil Benstead was co-opted onto Council in 1997 and elected 1998 (stepping down for a year in 2001 during his 'world tour'), and took over as Chairman of the Conservation Committee, on which he had previously served, in 2002. The Committee was set up by Council to recommend decisions on grants. The Chair takes the lead in the grant-approval process, and obviously desirable core competencies are conservation knowledge, scientific understanding and organisational skills. Phil has conducted hands-on ornithological fieldwork on three tropical continents and, with experience in the UK with the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust and the RSPB, he is very familiar with environmental issues around the world. He lives in Norfolk.

Simon Colenutt commenced his role as Assistant Bulletin Editor in late 2000, was co-opted on to Council late in 2001 and elected 2002. He shares the various burdens of the Bulletin Editor, with particular emphasis on sourcing photographs and chasing authors to meet deadlines. The same skills are required, and indeed Council sees the two positions as integral. Simon is a Hampshire-based freelance consultant ecologist working on contracts mostly in England, but he has wide experience of birding on three tropical continents, and he shares the responsibility for keeping the Bulletin on time and in shape.

Nigel Collar has served on Council since his election in 1998, and became **Chairman** in 1999. The role of Chairman is to direct and control meetings of Council, ensuring that all issues are properly covered, all opinions fairly heard and all decisions collectively approved; and to serve as a general point of reference for other activities of Council members. The Chairman is the first public face of the Club, although of course our campaigning role is relatively limited. Relevant experience in this case includes 22 years (down to the present) with BirdLife International, Cambridge, in various roles, seven of them writing *Threatened birds of Asia*. He is a founder member of OBC, and was the first editor of *Forktail* (1986–1991). He steps down as Chairman at the 2003 AGM, but, if re-elected, has agreed to take

on the role of Chairman of the Publications Committee.

Mike Edgecombe took over from Richard Eden as Promotions Officer on his election in 2000. Promotions are mainly about raising funds for conservation, and the remit here is to liaise with current and potential sponsors, organise OBC's annual prize draw, devise and/or pursue marketing opportunities, and coordinate events. Marketing and communication skills are clearly important. Mike is a qualified dental surgeon; when not birding (something he has done for 32 years) he fills his spare time as a pilot, ski instructor and middle-distance runner. He lives in north Norfolk.

Tim Loseby, co-opted on to Council in 1999 and elected 2000, occupies the post of Photographic Editor, a position designed to facilitate OBC's access to the best images we can source without cost. Clearly therefore a good knowledge of the photography business and its many players is helpful. Tim, after 35 years in the insurance industry, is now a professional wildlife photographer specialising in the Indian Subcontinent (but with 25 years' experience of birding in Asia). He regularly gives talks (notably at the British Birdwatching Fair) on the birds of Goa, Bharatpur and elsewhere; and his long years in insurance are a very useful extra asset, as we found out before our fundraising Fun Run this summer.

Nigel Redman has served OBC since 1984 when he was a member of the launching committee; he became the Club's first Treasurer when it was formally constituted and has continued a Council member ever since, most recently as Chairman of the Publications Committee. The Publications Committee oversees the content, format, production and timely publication of the Bulletin and *Forktail*. So there is a lot of liaison for the chair—with two editors, the designer, the printer and the Treasurer. The management of other publication projects also belongs with this position. Publishing, editing and ornithological skills are therefore all likely to help the jobholder. Nigel has been an editor and publisher since 1994, and a bird tour leader since 1982. Living in Sussex and working in London, he is now well known as the world's leading bird book publisher, and ironically it is this very elevation that in part has precipitated his decision to step down from Council at the 2003 AGM (see below).

Steve Rowland was elected to Council in 1996, serving as Membership Development Officer until the end of 1998 and as Publicity Officer since the start of 1999. The Club needs profile with the international and UK birding community, both as the premier Asian birding forum and as an important if small-scale conservation body. The position as currently constituted also requires leading on OBC involvement in the British Birdwatching Fair each August. This calls for communications and networking skills, familiarity with ornithological issues, writing ability, an eye for a story and access to the internet. Steve's day job is Public Affairs Officer with the RSPB based in north Norfolk, and he has travelled widely in Asia in search of birds. He is Council's nomination for the position of Chairman at the 2003 AGM, so the position of Publicity Officer falls vacant in 2004.

Graeme Spinks joined Council in 1993 and served as Treasurer from 1994 to 1998. In this period the complexity of the Club's financial affairs greatly increased, and he was pleased to pass some of the work and, from the start of 1999, the Treasurer's hat to Margaret Sykes. Since then, as **Assistant Treasurer** he has been responsible for keeping the books of account, producing the Annual Report and Accounts and liaising with the Charity Commission. He also took the lead in redrafting the Club constitution (in 2000–2001). The most time-consuming and fulfilling part of the role involves guiding the Club's ever-increasing number of conservation grant payments through the banking system to ever more remote destinations. Graeme is a qualified chartered accountant, now working as Group Financial Controller of BBC Worldwide. At this year's AGM he is nominated to take over again as Treasurer. In his spare time Graeme is a keen birder, both in the UK and abroad.

Brian Sykes joined Council in 1996, following his return to England (based in Cumbria on the Scottish borders) after nine years working in Asia. He quickly became involved in Club administration and until a year ago served as Secretary. Alongside wife Margaret he continues to play a big role in this part of running the Club. Being retired means having the time to devote to administrative mundanities, including receiving and distributing the Club's mail, most of which relates to membership. Brian also brings skills and knowledge from his former career to the post of **Sales Officer**, whose remit is largely to select and

produce trip reports and publications for sale, finalise designs for clothing items, pin badges, etc., and obtain competitive quotations for approval by Council.

Brian's more public persona is a result of OBC's 'Save Gurney's Pitta' campaign. When this became a matter of serious immediate concern, he recognised that a 'hands-on' approach was essential if the Club was to translate concern into action. He leads the campaign from the front and the results of his activities are reported perennially in the Bulletin. When the Smythies Fund (see OBC Bulletin 35: 2–3) was set up in 2001, it was a natural progression that the Gurney's Pitta campaign became the first Smythies project, and that Brian, as **Smythies Projects Co-ordinator**, should take responsibility for the day-to-day management of Smythies Fund projects.

Margaret Sykes followed husband Brian onto Council during 1997 when she was co-opted to the role of Membership Administration and was elected in 1998 as **Membership Secretary**. Maintaining the membership database, sending out reminders and publications to new members, explaining membership issues and organising the distribution of publications are all part of the job, so it obviously requires good organisational and communication skills as well as familiarity with databases and good computer skills. It is the most time-consuming job on Council.

Nevertheless, Margaret quickly became involved in the financial side of the Club, taking over day-to-day banking and related duties, before taking on the role of **Treasurer** in 1999. Since then she and Graeme Spinks have evolved into a team that shares the financial management of the Club. Margaret steps down as Treasurer at the 2003 AGM, but hopes to continue as Membership Secretary and to work with Graeme on the financial side. She is a qualified chartered accountant and was a partner in a private practice for many years before she went to live in Asia. During this time her love affair with the birds of the region was born.

Richard Thomas was co-opted onto Council in 1996 and elected in 1997, serving as Bulletin Editor until 2000 and since then as our Advertising Officer, selling advertising space in the Bulletin and liaising with the printers of our prize draw tickets. Sharp reflexes and an eye for the potential market are called for. Richard, remorseless world birder, Welsh rugby fan, English cricket supporter and husband of Sarah, our Secretary, was formerly

with the Royal Society of Chemistry but now works as Communications Manager with BirdLife International in Cambridge.

Sarah Thomas's role as Secretary (a post she took up on her election in 2003) means she is the custodian of Council minutes with the responsibility for chasing Council members to deliver on commitments (a role that was greatly developed by Brian Sykes, who still maintains things like our RAT—the Rolling Annual Timetable). The position requires considerable organisational and communication skills. Sarah has eight years' experience of journal publishing with the Royal Society of Chemistry, the last four as managing editor of *Chemical Communications*. She, like husband Richard (q.v.), is a dedicated world birder with a mainline interest in conservation.

Jim Wardill has served on Council as **Meetings Officer** since his election in 2003. His role is to organise the OBC's two annual meetings, one in Cley, north Norfolk (UK), in the summer, one in London in winter, and any others OBC decides to hold in partnership with other organisations. To make these meetings happen, venues and speakers need to be booked, catering and retail coordinated and help on the day drummed up from members and Council. Jim spent four years living and working on the Sangihe and Talaud Islands, Indonesia, where he led the Action Sampiri project, working to conserve the islands' endemic birds. His day job now is Regional Education Officer for the RSPB, based in West Yorkshire, where he combines his two passions, birds and environmental education.

Alan Wilkinson's duty as Internet Officer, following his election to Council in 2003, is to guide Council in how to use the web to advance the Club's goals. This involves agreeing sensible web communications objectives with Council, selecting relevant content from OBC's publications, and managing the design and delivery of the Club web pages. A strong ability to communicate, using interactive media, is needed. Alan has maintained OBC's website since its creation in 1995, having worked in the communications technology industry for 15 years. He helped develop BirdLife International's new website and currently works for Nokia on the usability of imaging mobile phones. He lives in London.

Forktail Editor

Our scientific journal *Forktail* appears once a year, and the responsibility of the editor is to ensure the quality of the contributions and the timely and typo-free delivery of the assembled issue, so that publication in August is always achieved. Preferable requirements in the editor are a good scientific training, strong ornithological knowledge of the Asian region, experience with editing manuscripts to a particular style, and knowledge of the publication process. Our current incumbent, **Stuart Butchart**, wrote his PhD in India on jacanas, and has undertaken several field projects in Indonesia; he worked on the final stages of *Threatened birds of Asia* and is now a key member of the BirdLife International (Cambridge) team working on threatened species evaluation. The editor of *Forktail* can be co-opted onto Council at his or her request at any time.

Membership Development Officer

This position is vacant. The Club aspires to increase its membership steadily over time, and by this means fulfil its objectives. Council needs someone to implement a strategy to strengthen and extend OBC's membership base. Qualities needed include inventiveness, energy and practicality.

The thumbnail sketches above I hope give some indication of the dimensions of the work Council undertakes. The fact remains that OBC owes a big debt to *all* Council members, past and present. The Club has been piloted from its earliest beginnings by a group of dedicated volunteers working in their 'spare time', doing what they perceived was and is necessary to push out the horizons of the Club. The hours they have spent in the service of the Club are unmeasured and immeasurable, and I warmly commend Council as fine company to keep on five Saturday afternoons of a year.

Invidious as it is to single people out, I cannot end without paying tribute to four members of Council with whom I have served my term as Chairman. First, **Margaret & Brian Sykes** have been absolutely outstanding during my tenure, at the time of writing holding down no fewer than *four* Council positions, and every year being the stalwarts of the British Birdwatching Fair. Brian chases birds with the same doggedness he chases people like me who fall short of his impossible standards. His bark makes your ears ring and his bite is far worse than his bark; only being married to Margaret prevents him from needing a licence. But Margaret herself has qualities that have the

same galvanising effect on her Council colleagues—not least a peculiarly bloodcurdling growl that she mainly reserves for those among us who have omitted to pay our subs. I, Council and the Club cannot thank the two of them fully enough for the dedication, professionalism and good fellowship they have brought to everything they do and have done on OBC's behalf.

Then there are our two longest-serving members of Council, both of whom have only recently stepped down after almost 40 years' service between them, having left their mark on the Club forever. **Tim Inskipp** (Council 1986–2002), a founder member of the Club, served as *Forktail* editor for eleven straight years and was the driving force behind our ground-breaking *Checklist*. No-one combines such breadth with such depth of knowledge of Asia's birds. His meticulous finding and keeping of information—including the compilation, over several decades,

of great ornithological bibliographies of each of the region's countries, along with lists of species recorded from each—remains an awesome phenomenon. All of us, whether we know it or not, have benefited hugely from this one-man data-digging roadshow. **Nigel Redman** (Council 1984–2003), another founder member, served OBC as Chairman of Council *twice* and Treasurer once, as well as Chairman of the Publications Committee. No-one has played so consistently committed a role in the formal governance of the Club as this, and the energy and practicality that show in all his various good works for OBC are one reason why the Club has been, and remains, so successful. I warmly congratulate and thank both Tim and Nigel for the extraordinary part (or rather parts) they have played in making OBC what it is today. We are all deeply in their shadow and their debt.

Nigel Collar

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Club News



Recent Club meetings and events

Saturday 5 July, 2003 – 'Run for Rainforest'

The OBC broke new ground when its first fundraising run, organised by Promotions Officer Mike Edgecombe, took place in Norfolk, UK on 5 July. The north Norfolk coast's long-distance footpath stretching from Hunstanton in the west to Cromer in the east was the chosen route. The full distance was 37 miles, but the run was organised as a non-competitive relay so that runners could run whatever distance suited them. The run started in cool conditions at 10 a.m. at Old Hunstanton and finished at 'The Dun Cow' public house at Salhouse in pleasant warm sunshine seven and a half hours later. Over 30 runners with ages ranging from six to 60-plus played their part and one runner managed over 27 miles before calling it a day.

The day was a great success; not only was the weather perfect for running but the evening ended with beers and food in the garden of the Dun Cow, enjoyed by both runners and supporters alike, and we were successful in the serious business of the day: more than £2,000 being raised for the OBC conservation fund!

Council would like to thank all the runners who put in the effort on the day and Crowes of Norwich, who sponsored the runners' T-shirts and Kelloggs, who donated 200 Nutri-grain bars to keep up energy levels! Special mention must go to OBC member John Gregory (see pic on page 10) who raised more than £500 and had this sum matched by his employer, Kelloggs. Most of all, thank you Mike for organising it all, although it cannot have been too stressful as June 26 has already been set for the 2004 run!

British Bird Watching Fair, 15–17 August, 2003

The Club was prominent once more at the 2003 Bird Fair. The OBC stand again focused on a specific cause. Council chose to raise the issue of the uncertain nature of the water supply to Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, Rajasthan, India. Visitors to the stand were invited to sign a petition in support of action planned by the Indian authorities to ensure a more permanent supply for the Park and the adjacent villages in times of prolonged drought.

The prize draw ticket sales team had a Leica APO Televid 62 telescope to tempt the visitors this year. The Club's thanks go to Leica once again for their generous support. Thanks go to volunteers Freda and Richard Eden, Richard Bosanquet, Vicki Harley, Mike Watson and Matthew and Debbie Rodgers. Special mention must go to overseas members Colin McIntosh (France) and Alan Kemp (South Africa) for their help.

Council member Steve Rowland negotiated a new brand of beer – 'Bharatpur Bitter' – with the BBWF caterers. Steve also masterminded the panel game 'Call My Ruff' once more for the BBWF organisers. This was again very popular with visitors, although sadly Steve injured his back the day before the fair and could not take centre stage; Chairman Nigel Collar deputised.

The OBC speakers also focused on the Indian Sub-continent, Brian Sykes spoke on 'Bharatpur – Wetland under threat?' and on 'Goa – Gateway to the Orient' and Tim Loseby gave another polished presentation, this time on Sri Lanka. OBC triumphed for the second year in the 'Bird Brain of Britain' competition. The OBC was represented by the Chairman in the four-cornered contest against ABC, NBC and OSME. He took 'Threatened Birds of Asia' as his specialist topic and much to his surprise, but not ours, won the competition. Well done Nigel!

The Conservation Cup five-a-side football competition is now so popular that teams are queuing up to take part. Things continue to get more competitive on the field of play and once again there was no glory for 'Forktail Palace' despite an improved performance in a tough group. RSPB got their name on the trophy again and the right to keep it as winners for the third time! Thanks again to Marcus Kohler, aided and abetted by Mike Edgecombe, for organising the event. Well 'Forktails', once again there is always next year to look forward to, if Marcus still has the legs. Conservation projects again benefited to the tune of some £500, thanks to the support from WildSounds and O.U.P.

The Club's thanks go to Zeiss who provide bursaries to help OBC and many of the other small conservation societies attending the Fair. We are very grateful for this continuing support that

enables the Club to have a double stand at a reasonable cost.

Thanks again go to all Club members who picked up their copy of *Forktail 19* at the Bird Fair or at Cley the following week. In all, about 250 copies were handed out saving about £400 in mailing charges. Look out for *Forktail 20* at the 2004 Bird Fair.



OBC Summer Meeting Cley, 24 August 2003

For the first year in living memory we were entirely without the services of Dick Filby. Club Meetings Officer Jim Wardill took over as compere and Mike Edgecombe again performed miracles in the kitchen under difficult circumstances. Three excellent and varied talks were enjoyed by the rather small audience. Martjan Lammertink spoke on 'Indonesia's Woodpecker Forests' and not only showed some stunning pictures of the birds but also the hair-raising lengths he had to go to get them! Duncan Macdonald and Pieter Wessels of WildSounds presented 'Bird Sound Recording – How & Why', a workshop which unravelled some of the complexity and mythology surrounding the techniques. The final talk was by Brian Sykes who presented a longer version of his Bird Fair talk 'Bharatpur – Wetlands under threat?' At the end of the programme, the winning tickets in the OBC 2003 Mega Prize Draw were drawn. The winner of the superb Leica APO Televid 62 telescope donated by Leica was Jean Faulkner, a Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust volunteer at BBWF. Council's thanks go to all the prize donors: Leica, London Camera Centre (Winchester), Lynx Edicions, Christopher Helm/A & C Black and New Holland.

For the first time it did not rain as we fired up the evening barbeque! About 35 members and friends stayed on to enjoy the food.

Thanks to the speakers, the WildSounds team, Mike Edgecombe for the food, and all the helpers in the kitchen. Well done Jim, a great first meeting! Sadly the turn out was disappointing with numbers down on 2002 and continuing the trend of slow decline of the last several years. There were very few new faces to be seen, and the nearby Citrine Wagtail did not seem to draw the crowds either. The proximity of the event to the BBWF puts a big strain on WildSounds and the Council members involved in both events.

Council has decided to try a change of date and combine the summer meeting with the 'Fun Run' in 2004. The run will take place on Saturday 26 June followed by the meeting on Sunday 27 June. Council hopes that those supporting the run will make a weekend of it; the meeting will start

earlier on Sunday morning than in the past and finish by mid-afternoon so that people can make their way home in good time. If interest cannot be restored over the next few years, then the meeting will have to be discontinued.

OBC Tour to Tibet 20 July–6 August, 2003

The second OBC tour to the remote high-altitude Tibetan plateau in the Chinese province of Qinghai built on the success of the 2002 tour. Despite the 'SARS' debacle, there was again a good response from OBC members and the nine participants enjoyed another *tour de force* by Jesper Hornskov. It was equally well organised as the 2002 tour and for the second year there was a brilliant show of birds and mammals including most of the sought-after species. Delights such as Kozlov's Bunting, White Eared-Pheasant, Tibetan Snowcock, Crested Tit-warbler and Prevalski's Nuthatch vied for attention with Tibetan Sandgrouse, and all six species of snowfinch found in this area, whilst mammals were represented by a couple of wolves, a rare Mainland Serow and close-up views of Kiang, the Tibetan Wild Ass. This is not to mention the scenery and wild flowers of overwhelming beauty and diversity.

Council wishes to thank Mike Edgecombe and Jesper Hornskov for their brilliant co-operation in organising another success. The complex job of looking after the needs of a diverse group originating from Belgium, Cambodia, Kenya, Sweden and the USA, as well as the UK, was successfully negotiated. Mike is now working on new ideas and we hope to be able to work with Jesper again in the future. Another good result for conservation too with about £700 raised for the OBC Conservation fund.

Club Announcements

Winter Meeting and AGM 2003

The 19th OBC Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday 29 November, 2003 at the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) 68–71 Newman Street, London W1T 3AH. Details of the full programme, including a sketch map of how to find the new venue were sent out in October with the annual report and accounts. Newman Street is a very central location off Oxford Street. Doors will open at 11h00, the first talk will commence at 11h45 and will be followed by the AGM at 12h30. Council decided to change to this smaller, more economical venue as a result of the poor attendance at recent London meetings. The change has resulted in significant savings and

Council has determined to put the cash saved to good use by transferring the equivalent amount to the conservation fund. Council hopes that more members and friends will attend this year's event. Again there is a good line up of talks, the OBC book service operated by WildSounds, refreshments, day draw and Club sales at a very central location in London.

OBC Book Service

The Club book service is operated by WildSounds. The prime objective is to provide a competitive and excellent service, but Council also asks for members' support as it benefits the Club's conservation fund when members make a purchase. WildSounds attend all Club events/meetings and this benefits the fund too.

If you want to order goods in advance of meetings, please contact WildSounds by E-mail: <sales@wildsounds.com> or phone (UK) 01263 741 100.

Membership Renewal for 2004

If your subscription is due for renewal on 1 January 2004, and you do not pay by bankers order, a renewal form was sent out with the AGM papers. Please renew right away! Early renewal helps the Membership Secretary and saves members money. Publications for members renewing late are mailed out individually by the Membership Secretary at substantial extra cost to the Club.

Save time & cost – rejoin 'online' using a secure credit card facility. Simply visit the Club website <<http://www.orientalbirdclub.org>>, click on 'Join OBC' and follow the steps.

Dates for your diary – Club Events in 2004

- The British Birdwatching Fair 2004 will be held 20–22 August at Rutland Water.
- The OBC 2004 'Fun Run' will be held on Saturday 26 June in north Norfolk and will be followed by the OBC Summer meeting to be held at Cley Village Hall on Sunday 27 June. Please note the break from the traditional date. Why not make a weekend of it!

OBC Sales – New Items

The Club Sales Leaflet 2003/4 and order form was circulated to members with the 2003 AGM papers. This gives full details of all items available, including changes to the colour range of the Club 'logo' T-shirts and sweatshirts.

All items are available by mail order and orders may also be sent by E-mail.

New Trip Reports

Two new reports are available 'North East India, December 2002' by John Flynn, Steve Holloway, Graeme Spinks & Bob Watts. It covers visits to Kaziranga, Digboi and Namdapha and includes itinerary, detailed daily log, maps and annotated checklist. Several scarce/sought-after species were seen. Price £6.00 surface/£7.00 airmail.

Hot off the press is 'Philippines, Jan–April 2003' from Andy Adcock, Rob Hutchinson & Sam Woods. The report covers visits to the islands of Luzon, Negros, Panay, Mindanao, Mindoro, Palawan, Siquijor, Bohol and Cebu. Running to 94pp it includes 23 maps, an annotated checklist and an appendix summarising the Philippine endemics, the islands where they occur and the best sites for seeing them. Price £12.00 surface/£13.00 airmail.

Council thanks all donors of trip reports. We are always interested to receive new reports, particularly from little-visited areas. All profits from the sale of trip reports go to the conservation fund.

New Garments and Accessories

New style hat to wear in the field! The OBC 'bucket' style hat is featured on the OBC website, it offers effective all round protection from sunlight. In forest green and embroidered with the OBC logo. Available in two sizes – medium and large. Price £8.00 surface or £9.00 airmail.

Internet update

Please use the Club E-mail address <mail@orientalbirdclub.org> to notify the Club of address changes, membership renewals, sales orders, general enquiries and to contact any Council member.

Contributions for the Club publications may also be submitted in this way. Please ensure that contributions and attachments sent to the Club are virus-free. If you have any doubts about the system you use, please mail a hard copy as back-up.

The Club website at <<http://www.orientalbirdclub.org>> is a great source of information about the Club. Please ask prospective members to take a look.

Both the E-mail discussion groups *OrientalBirding* and *OrientalBirdingPix* run in association with the Club may be accessed through the website. Lively discussions take place on many topics and they are a good way to get help and have questions answered, often by experts. Please do remember, however, that the opinions expressed are those of the writers, not those of OBC Council and do not represent Club policy.

They are free, why not sign up and give them a trial?

Oriental Bird Images (OBI) launched

The OBC Image Database has been re-launched under the new name of *Oriental Bird Images* (OBI). The database has been redesigned for faster loading and easier browsing. OBI is found on its own dedicated website at <www.orientalbirdimages.org>. It is a great resource for anyone interested in Asian birds with some 1,500 species represented by 4,000 photographs contributed by more than 160 photographers. Many species are not yet represented in the database. If you have photographs you are willing to contribute, please E-mail <imagemaster@orientalbirdimages.org>.

The OBC would like to thank all the photographers who have kindly contributed their images to the database, as well as Krys Kazmierczak who fathered the project and the volunteer team who have given their free time to edit and compile the collection.



John Gregory and Jane Whitaker pictured during the OBC Fun Run. See page 7

Advertise in the OBC Bulletin

Council thanks all those who advertise regularly in the OBC Bulletin. Advertisements help to offset the cost of production and the benefit to the Club from this is significant. The standard Bulletin advertisement rates [black & white] are: full page £135; half page £85; quarter page £60. Colour advertisements are available at extra cost.

Please contact Richard Thomas <Richard.Thomas@birdlife.org.uk> for more information.

Thank you, Nigel!

Elsewhere in this issue, the retiring Chairman, Nigel Collar pays tribute to other members of Council. Council would like to take this opportunity to thank Nigel for keeping us in order and overseeing our deliberations for the last five years, a time of many changes. Nigel has not missed one of the more than 25 Council meetings during his tenure, an indication of the commitment he has made to the Club.

Stop Press!

OBC is delighted to welcome a new Corporate Sponsor – Asia Ecological Consultants Ltd of Hong Kong.

Asia Ecological Consultants Ltd will fund a new annual grant of £1,500 – the AEC-OBC Conservation Award. The recipient of the first grant will be announced at the AGM on 29th November.

On behalf of all members, OBC Council would like to thank Geoff Carey, Paul Leader and Mike Leven of Asia Ecological Consultants (all long-term OBC members!) for this support of our conservation work.

And one final piece of good news – founder member David Bishop is donating all future royalties from his book 'Birds of Wallacea' to the OBC conservation fund. If you do not already have this book, buy it now and help the Club! Thank you very much David!

Gurney's Pitta Campaign 2003 – Update



A cover page header from 'Kom Chad Leuk', a Thai national newspaper, in which the King of Thailand expressed his concern for the survival of Gurney's Pitta

General and political

The restructuring of the Thai Civil Service has continued slowly following the major changes in the political landscape responsible for administration of protected areas in Thailand and therefore pertinent to the struggle to save Gurney's Pitta *Pitta pitta gurneyi*. It is hoped that there will be increased recognition of the importance of middle rank officials enthusiastic to make a difference and that it is better to keep officials who have already had a beneficial impact 'in post' than to move them on in the traditional annual reshuffle.

The high level of activity reported in Bulletin 37 has continued. The interest at national level has been substantial following the TV reports of the large encroachment during January. The national press has continued to carry reports including one in the newspaper 'Kom Chad Luek' under the headline that 'The King has expressed His concern for the survival of Gurney's Pitta to Minister Prapat'. Royal interest and expression of concern has a very positive and potent effect in Thailand. The cover story in the August 2003 issue of the popular Thai monthly magazine 'Sarakadee' was a lengthy article on Gurney's Pitta by OBC member Petch Manopawitr, reviewing 17 years of efforts to conserve the species.

Committee-work to consolidate the earlier progress has continued. Kunakorn Boonsai has

been appointed Conservation Officer under the terms of the Royal Forestry Department-RSPB-BCST species recovery project and Ms Somying Tanhikorn has been appointed by the Forestry Department to the field-work team. RSPB's Paul Donald conducted a workshop at site in late October to develop the fieldwork programme for 2004. A meeting of the steering committee has been called for 12 November.

The visit to KNC by Steve Elliott of Chiang Mai University Forest Restoration Research Unit (FORRU) and George Gale of King Mongkut's University (ref. Bulletin 37) went ahead and has had immediate positive outcomes. A group of Ban Bang Tiew villagers and Krabi Province Forestry Department staff attended a workshop on re-forestation run by FORRU at Chiang Mai in September. OBC paid for the transportation of the group to Chiang Mai. Discussions are now in hand about setting up and managing tree nurseries at Ban Bang Tiew School. Brian Sykes will have a follow-up meeting with Steve and George during November to discuss the next steps and assess the requirement for future OBC involvement.

Another interesting development has been the formation of the 'Gurney's Pitta Conservation Group'. This organisation is the first independent Thai 'pressure group' working for the conservation of Gurney's Pitta and came into existence as a result of the publicity surrounding

the big encroachments in early 2003. It is made up of about 100 Thais from all walks of life, their common interest being bird watching and natural history. They decided to submit a petition to the Prime Minister's office. A journalist presently employed by *Khao Sod*, the newspaper that ran the interview with Brian Sykes in September 2000 as a cover story, is a member of the group and consequently a very good link to the media should a crisis arise. OBC wishes them well and hopes for co-operation with them in the future once they are established.

Developments at site

The OBC-funded enhanced patrolling continued into the wet season. This has been effective and the Unit leader Khun Somprat became such a problem to the encroachers that they attempted to get rid of him by complaining that he was failing in his duty! This activity preceded an important ceremonial re-planting in late August of one of the large encroachments involving the ripping out of oil palm plants. It is estimated that about 4,000 people attended the ceremony led by Minister Prapat who planted the first sapling. Clearly this action sent out a strong message. Attempts were made by the encroachers to sabotage preparations for the event by spreading nails on tracks and destroying a bridge with explosives to interrupt vehicular access by Forestry Department staff.

Most recent developments indicate that a long-held dream may at last become reality. A new patrolling regime is being drawn up. The plan calls for a new 14-strong unit to patrol an area of about 21,000 rai (3,300 hectares) that includes all the core area where the remaining breeding territories are located. Effectively this is all the remaining reserve forest below 200 m and it includes the parts of the Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) that contains territories. The unit will have authority throughout this area, thereby overcoming the old problem of divided authority. Khun Somprat has been appointed to head the unit and he is already installed at an 'HQ' with a small team.

OBC may be involved in helping to equip and train the unit. It is not yet clear what budget the Forestry Department will allocate to the unit for the purchase of basic items, GPS and field radio gear.

Together with WCS-Thailand Programme and South Bangkok Rotary, OBC is planning to fund a further ranger training course. It will be organised and run by WCS-Thailand again and will focus on the training needs of the new unit,

although places on it will be offered to WLS Superintendent Somprat as a 'refresher course' for his team. It is hoped that events will move quickly enough for the training to take place before the onset of the dry season.

Yotin Meekaeo has recently completed the OBC-funded 2003 Human Use Survey on the same basis as in 2001 and 2002 over the same six-month period.

OBC would again like to thank the staff of BCST, WCS Thailand, and WWF Thailand for their help and co-operation during 2003, and South Bangkok Rotary for their continued interest and support.

Hot News!

A late-nesting pair of Gurney's Pitta was found in early October by the research team at KNC and continuous surveillance of the nest was set up. It transpired that four eggs had been laid of which three hatched. One of the hatchlings died quite soon, probably from starvation. The two remaining young progressed but with predation by two species of common forest snake being a serious threat. Over a ten-day period there were five nocturnal attacks on the nestlings, two in one night. One of the young birds was bitten, fell from the nest and died. The survivor fledged and left the nest on 24 October in answer to contact calls from its parents. This early success is a great tribute to the enthusiasm and dedication of the team and promises well for the 2004 programme.

Fundraising: Fund GPS Equipment – Purchase Gurney's Pitta Memorabilia

As reported above, it is anticipated that the budget allocated to the new core area protection unit will fall short of the amount required to purchase all the necessary GPS and radio equipment to make the unit truly effective.

On page 52 of this Bulletin the 'Photospot' includes stunning photographs of male and female Gurney's Pitta taken by Kanit Kanikul, a member of the Gurney's Pitta Conservation Group. Prints (approx 200 mm x 300 mm) of these photographs are offered for sale at £10.00 each including post and packing in a reinforced envelope. We estimate that sales of 30 prints will enable the Club to fund one GPS unit of the type proven to be effective in the area. Please will anyone interested in helping in this way contact Brian Sykes by any of the usual methods. Please remember to state whether you require the female or the male!

Brian Sykes



Conservation Fund

Compiled by Phil Benstead with contributions
from Geoff Hilton and Carol Inskipp.

GRANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Imperial Eagles and other raptors of the proposed Kuitun-Zima Steppe IBA

A Small Grant of £500 has been awarded to Igor Fefelov to undertake a survey of the Kuitun-Zima steppe (some 1,000 km²) to ascertain whether IBA designation is justified by assessing the importance of the area for breeding Imperial Eagles *Aquila heliaca*. Five territories are known to exist inside the area. Aside from searches for active territories during the breeding season, the team will also collect food remains, moulted feathers and egg-shell remains for further molecular-genetic and toxicological analysis.

Waterbird populations of Lebak Pampangan – Ogan Komerling Lebak, Sumatra, Indonesia

A Small Grant of £500 has been awarded to Ali Imron to count waterbirds during the austral winter on Lebak Pampangan which is part of the Ogan Komerling Lebak wetland complex in Sumatra. The site is poorly known and may prove to hold important populations of Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* and Milky Stork *Mycteria cinerea*.

Status and population of Sarus Crane in west-central Nepal

A Small Grant of £500 has been awarded to Achyut Aryal to fully fund his study of Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* in Rupandehi and Kapilvastu districts of lowland west-central Nepal. The whole population of this globally threatened species in Nepal is now found in these districts. Conservation of Sarus Crane in Nepal is difficult as it chiefly occurs outside protected areas. According to the available literature and local people the species is declining in the area. This study therefore aims to assess the population status and distribution of Sarus Crane in Rupandehi and Kapilvastu Districts, identify current threats and provide the necessary baseline data for future actions and management recommendations. The work will be carried out between December 2003 and June 2004.



Sarus Crane *Grus antigone*. By Craig Robson (courtesy of Birdquest).

Population status, breeding success and habitat preference of Lesser Adjutant in Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve, Nepal

Dr Hem Sagar Baral has been given a Small Grant of £500 which will fund his work on the globally threatened Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*. Previously, this species was commonly found in lowland Nepal but due to habitat loss and human disturbance it is now mainly restricted to some isolated pockets in protected areas. Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve is one of the most important remaining areas for Lesser Adjutant in Nepal. However, annual waterfowl counts indicate that bird populations are declining here. No previous systematic census or ecological study has been made of the species at Koshi. This project aims to estimate the species's population and breeding success, study its habitat preferences, assess threats to its survival and recommend conservation measures. The study will be made over a period of one year, starting in October 2003.

Environmental education through birdwatching training to ten high school Adventurer Clubs in Bogor – pilot project in West Java, Indonesia

A Small Grant of £500 has been awarded to Wim Ikbal for birdwatching activities aimed at raising conservation awareness and broadening the environmental knowledge of students of 10 high school Adventurer Clubs in Bogor Regency, Java, Indonesia. The project aims to provide the students with environmental awareness and build capacity, through simple birdwatching training. Activities will take place in Bogor Botanical Garden, and students will be taken through a short course involving observation skills, identification (species, habitat, and behaviour), interpretation, discovery documentation and a wider appreciation of nature.

Ecological studies on White-rumped Vulture in Rampur Valley, Nepal

Ramji Gautam and Nabin Baral have been awarded another Small Grant of £500 to continue their survey work on White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* in the Rampur Valley, Palpa District, Nepal. OBC provided a Small Grant for this project last year and the important results of the study are given below in this conservation fund report. The aims of this study are to continue monitoring the population and breeding success of this critically threatened species in the Rampur Valley. A socio-economic survey of the use of diclofenac, a chemical that has been identified as a likely cause of vulture declines in India, will also be carried out. The livestock population and the occurrence of any livestock diseases in the valley will be assessed. Studies on the general ecology of White-rumped Vulture and an assessment of threats will be made, followed by conservation recommendations for the species at this site.

(For more info on vulture declines see ATO page 82)

The ghost birds of Sulawesi, Indonesia: surveys and conservation of nightjars and owls

A Small Grant of £1,000 has been awarded to Yayasan Pelestarian Alam Liar Sulawesi (PALS) to undertake nocturnal surveys for owls and nightjars in the forests of the Minahassa Peninsula (Sulawesi) and on the island of Siau. The four main target species for the programme are all little-known, threatened, endemic species. Siau Scops Owl *Otus siaoensis* is endemic to the small island of Siau and is known only from a unique specimen collected in 1866. It is currently listed as Critically Endangered as only a small population is assumed to survive because of the widespread habitat destruction on Siau. On mainland Sulawesi, the Minahassa Masked Owl *Tyto inexpectata* is only known from a small number of primary lowland

**The Population Status of
Volcano Swiftlet in Mount
Gede and Pangrango National
Park, West Java Province,
Indonesia**

and montane forest sites; Heinrich's Nightjar *Eurostopodus diabolicus* is known from three protected areas in northern and central Sulawesi; whilst the Cinnabar Hawk Owl *Ninox ios* is known from just four sightings from sub-montane forest in north and central Sulawesi. It is hoped that this study will greatly contribute to our knowledge of these poorly known species.

A Small Grant of £500 has been awarded to Imanuddin and team to study the population of Volcano Swiftlets *Collocalia vulcanorum* that resides in the crater of the Mount Gede volcano. Volcano Swiftlets are considered near-threatened and are known from just four volcano craters in West Java. Unsurprisingly for a species with a penchant for nesting in active volcanos, colonies are believed to be susceptible to periodic extinction. Colony size is assumed to average just 25 individuals which gives a low total population figure (even if the species is discovered in the 8–9 potential craters within its range). This study constitutes the first attempt to count the population at Gunung Gede.

**Globally threatened birds in
Eastern Siberia and the
Russian Far East – a literature
search**

A Small Grant of £500 has been awarded to Jevgeni Shergalin to undertake a literature search on the globally threatened birds of eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East – a region that supports 57 species which are either globally threatened or near-threatened. This project will compile and translate relevant publications from the vast fund of work undertaken by Russian scientists and ornithologists – much of which is simply not available in western Europe. The project has the potential to add greatly to our knowledge of threatened birds in the region and will be especially useful to conservation bodies such as BirdLife International when undertaking red data species evaluations.



**OBC
Tibet Tour
2002**

**Survey of birds in Raja Rani
Community Forest, Morang
District, East Nepal**



A Small Grant of £500 will fully fund a survey of birds in Raja Rani Community Forest in eastern Nepal to be carried out by Yub Raj Basnet and Gautam Benu. The forest lies in the Siwalik hills at an altitude of 500–600 m and is located between two forests recognised by BirdLife International as Important Bird Areas: Dharan Forest which lies to the north-west of Raja Rani and the Mai valley to the east. The forest is dense, covers 169.5 ha, has three ponds covering around 20 ha and mainly comprises *Sal Shorea robusta* with plenty of epiphytes. Bird species known to occur include the near-threatened Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*, plus Pale Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis unicolor* and Long-tailed Broadbill *Psarisomus dalhousiae*, both of which are scarce in Nepal. People in neighbouring villages depend on the forest for their subsistence economy. The main aims of the study are to determine the seasonal avian diversity and to assess the habitat quality of the community forest for bird conservation.

Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*. By Michael Hodgson (courtesy of Birdquest).

CONSERVATION FUND REPORTS OF GRANT-ASSISTED WORK

Survey of Mrs Hume's Pheasant in north-eastern India



LEICA



Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*. By Hil Bruinsma.

The 2000 Forktail-Leica Award went to Dr Anwaruddin Choudhury, to conduct a survey of the poorly known Mrs Hume's Pheasant *Symnaticus humiae* in north-eastern India. The fieldwork was carried out in the states of Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram between 2000 and early 2002. The survey found the bird to be well distributed in all three states though its range has certainly shrunk. Twenty new sites were found, with an additional 24 unconfirmed.

This was the first survey specifically aimed at Mrs Hume's Pheasant in India, so it provides important baseline data for future surveys. The species may also occur in adjacent areas of Arunachal Pradesh but is unlikely in Assam. Phek and Tuensang districts in Nagaland, Ukhrul and Senapati districts in Manipur and Chāmphai district in Mizoram contain the bulk of the remaining habitat. Phawngpui National Park (93°01'E) in Mizoram is the westernmost known locality of the species.

Habitat loss and snaring were the main threats recorded; trade in the species is still negligible. The species is poorly covered by existing protected areas: none in areas of Manipur with known *humiae* populations. Protected areas in Mizoram and Nagaland account for only 6% of the total potential habitat of the species in the study area.

Mt Saramati, an unexplored area in Nagaland (S.D. Ripley II had a dream to visit the area in 1950s but was refused permission by the government) was also visited. Among threatened species recorded there were Blyth's Tragopan *Tragopan blythii* and Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*. Elsewhere, threatened species such as the Wood Snipe *Gallinago nemoricola* (in Nagaland) and Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus* (in Manipur) were recorded.

In all the places visited, informal discussions with villagers were held in order to raise awareness of the species and its habitats. The project report recommends that conservation measures should include the creation of new protected areas, better protection and management of existing protected areas, raising awareness among villagers, and control of snaring and tree-felling.

Report reference:

Choudhury, A. U. (2002) *Survey of Mrs Hume's Pheasant in north-eastern India*. Technical Report No. 5. The Rhino Foundation for nature in NE India, Guwahati, India [final report to Oriental Bird Club, U.K.]. 30pp, maps, photos.

Conservation awareness programme around Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve, Nepal

The reserve is especially important for grassland birds. In addition to supporting the country's most important population of the globally threatened Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis*, it hosts good populations of four other globally threatened grassland species: Swamp Francolin *Francolinus gularis*, Bristled Grassbird *Chaetornis striatus* and Finn's Weaver *Ploceus megarhynchus*, which all breed, and wintering Hodgson's Bushchat *Saxicola insignis*. The critically threatened White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* and Slender-billed Vulture *G. tenuirostris* also breed at Suklaphanta (see the report below by Som GC and JB Giri).

The three-day programme for students living around Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve was held from 6–8 April 2003 at

Siddhanath Science Campus, Mahendranagar. A resource handbook containing useful articles was provided along with other relevant literature.

A total of 53 students from high schools attended, including students from different disciplines of science and with various educational backgrounds and levels. There was an essay competition and a painting competition, while more senior students were asked to prepare detailed field reports. On the last day the group went on a birdwatching tour of the reserve to provide the students with practical experience of things they had learned in the programme.

Almost all participants (96.1%) would take part in a similar programme in future. The majority liked the resource materials provided but students were choosy about the sessions that they liked; 38.4% liked all the sessions and 46.1% enjoyed the reserve visit. The students also made an honest evaluation about the shortcomings of the programme, citing the inconvenience of transport, short span of the event and long lecture hours.

Thanks are due to the Bird Conservation Nepal family for co-ordinating the project. Special thanks go to Siddhanath Science Campus family for their logistical support. Warm appreciation goes to Dharnidhar Joshi, Campus Chief and the faculties of life sciences for their enthusiasm in executing the programme. It is good to see that course participants are working towards forming a birdwatching club in the area.

*Bijay Tamang, c/o Bird Conservation Nepal, PO Box 12465,
Lazimpat, Nepal*

Studies of vultures in far western lowland Nepal

A study was made of the critically threatened White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* and Slender-billed Vulture *G. tenuirostris* at Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve, in far western Nepal. This was a follow-up survey to that carried out last year. The main aims were to assess the population of both species, estimate the food availability and to quantify mortality rate and breeding success.

A preliminary survey to locate nests, find suitable habitat and identify survey sites was conducted. Four bi-monthly visits, each lasting 4–5 days, were then made to study the vultures' breeding ecology. Nesting trees were identified, permanently marked and each nest was numbered. Nests were monitored bi-monthly and the number of successful nests was recorded.

The grasslands were visited on foot to find carcasses. Carcass species, condition and number of carcasses were recorded. Nearby villages were also surveyed and data on carcasses were collected with the assistance of local people. The interior of large grasslands such as Suklaphanta was not surveyed due to the risk of encounters with tigers and wild elephants. The species and age of dead vultures were noted. A direct counting method was used to estimate the populations of each species.

A total of 14 nests was recorded and all belonged to White-rumped Vulture. Nests were concentrated at one site, Silalekh, where ten nests were located. The silk cotton tree *Bombax ceiba* was most commonly used for nesting, holding 72% of nests. A high rate of nest abandonment was observed and only four nests were successful. The number of abandoned nests increased unexpectedly from two by mid-December 2002 to ten by the end of February

2003 as it had in the previous year. The reason for this is unknown. Not one Slender-billed Vulture nest was discovered.

There was no indication of food shortage at the reserve. A total of 24 carcasses was recorded in and around the reserve – a decline from 2002 when 38 carcasses were found. The majority (12) belonged to Swamp Deer. The vultures seldom feed upon cow carcasses as most are buried by local people.

Populations of both species are healthy in Suklaphanta. Totals of 28 White-rumped and 21 Slender-billed Vultures were counted. No significant decline in White-rumped Vulture was noted compared to the previous year. The Slender-billed Vulture population is especially high in comparison to elsewhere in Nepal. However, numbers of this species declined after February 2003.

We recommend the establishment of a vulture breeding centre in Nepal. Dead vultures should be examined in order to determine the causes of death. A survey of local people's attitudes towards vultures and an awareness-raising educational programme should be carried out. Feeding stations for vultures should be established and in the course of time villagers should be encouraged to dispose of their dead animals at these sites (or in ways that enable vultures to feed on them). Long-term monitoring of vultures in Nepal is highly recommended.

Som GC and JB Giri
c/o Bird Conservation Nepal, PO Box 12465, Lazimpat,
Kathmandu, Nepal

(For more info on vulture declines see ATO page 82)

Ecological studies on White-rumped Vulture in Rampur valley, Palpa District, Nepal

A survey was conducted of the critically threatened White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* in Rampur valley, western lowland Nepal from October 2002 to May 2003. Efforts were made to quantify population size, adult mortality rate, breeding success and pesticide use.

Absolute counts were carried out early in the morning and evening at nesting and roosting sites. The number of vultures at carcasses was also counted whenever possible. The population was estimated to be 72–101 individuals during the breeding season, rising to 123 post-breeding. A total of 33 dead vultures was recorded, of which 30 were adults and three were sub-adults/juveniles. No cause for the high adult mortality rate is known. Despite this, the population has not decreased compared to the previous year. Head drooping behaviour was not observed.

A nest census was made between October and March and 70 nests were found on 56 trees. A total of 35 nests was successful – notably high compared to other sites in Nepal at the present time. Half of the nests failed. Reasons for this could include a violent storm which may have dislodged some nests; crows harrassing the chicks, and the deaths of some adults. Of five tree species used for nesting, Simal *Bombax ceiba* was preferred. During the survey, logging of mature trees began at one of the nest colonies. The survey team made efforts to stop the logging and were successful after just ten trees were felled.

A survey was conducted to find out how the local community disposed of livestock carcasses, the extent of pesticide use, attitudes to conservation and to assess threats to the vultures. The abundant carcasses, left in the open air, are the only food source for the

vultures. About 85% of the respondents believe that vultures should be conserved while 77.1% were aware of the importance of vultures in sanitation by consuming carcasses. Seven per cent of respondents described the vultures as beautiful birds and believed that their bones have medicinal value. However, there were no reports of vultures being killed for this purpose. All households surveyed use one or more pesticides, including DDT and dieldrin. The main threats identified to vultures were natural calamities such as storms and predation and loss of nesting trees.

In almost all areas of Nepal the population of White-rumped Vultures is declining because of high adult mortality and almost total breeding failure. However in Rampur good numbers of the vultures still exist and breeding success is relatively high. The area may serve as a good breeding ground for the species and future survey work is planned to monitor the population and to investigate the cause of adult mortality.

*Ramji Gautam, Bijay Tamang and Nabin Baral,
c/o Bird Conservation Nepal, PO Box 12465, Lazimpat, Nepal*

(For more info on vulture declines see ATO page 82)

Erratum

In Bulletin 37 pp16 and 17, the address of Rishi Valley Education Centre should be Andhra Pradesh and not Arunachal Pradesh as stated.

In Bulletin 37 p.34, line 4, IUON should read IUCN. We apologise to the author — *eds.*

Great precision can weigh so little.



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my point of view

How many bird species are there in Asia?

Worlds apart: the new and old taxonomies

How greatly 'overlumped' is the Asian avifauna? That is to say, how many Asian bird taxa are there which might well merit species status but which currently languish in the lower rank of subspecies? My impression is that over the past half-century or so other parts of the world have advanced much further in taxonomic matters, with a greater number of workers focusing on avian systematics and a concomitant greater number of species being identified for their regions. If Storm's Stork *Ciconia stormi* and Woolly-necked Stork *C. episcopus* lived in the Amazon, would it really have taken until the 1980s to agree that they were two species? If Sumatran Cochoa *Cochoa beccarii* and Javan Cochoa *C. azurea* were found in Africa, would so ludicrously distinct a pair of species (see Plate 1) have lasted until 1987 to be separated? And if the New World can have quite so many *Aratinga* species, why is Asia left with so few *Trichoglossus* (see Plate 2a,b)? As Europe, Australia, Africa and the Americas steadily revise and clarify their avifaunas, Asian birds seem to be cut adrift from the new systematic enterprise.

This is particularly ironic given that, chiefly because of the massive and burgeoning human population (amongst whom the number of practising avian taxonomists can be counted on the fingers of one hand), birds in Asia are more seriously threatened than those of any other region (Collar 2001). How many subspecies are there which are threatened with extinction and which, under the taxonomic standards set in Europe and the Americas, would merit species rank (and therefore more immediate conservation interest)? This issue in particular haunted many of the editors, myself included, during the seven years that *Threatened birds of Asia* (BirdLife International 2001) was in preparation.

Number discontinued

According to the OBC *Checklist* (Inskipp *et al.* 1996) there were 2,586 species of bird known from the region covered by the Club in the mid-1990s. Because we included all of Pakistan and China, this number was slightly larger than that contained in the biogeographic 'Oriental' region, whose rather hazy boundaries cut through these two countries. With the Club's recent decision to

include the north-eastern territories (Mongolia, Russia east of 90°E, the Korean Peninsula and Japan), we added a further 71 species (listed in *OBC Bull.* 31: 6–7), so the grand total could be said now to stand at 2,657.

But of course that is not the right answer to the question in my title; indeed, there *is* no one right answer. To begin with, we cannot presume that we have found, or will ever know, all the species in the region, although each new species discovered changes the total and reminds us of exciting further possibilities. Then, if what we want is an idea of what species the region truly *supports*, vagrants need to be excluded, and determining what are truly vagrants in a huge, relatively underwatched region is something that could be argued over at length. Then there is the definition of 'Asia', which could also be argued over at length. And finally there is the definition of 'species', which *is* argued over at length, to very little conclusion (the *Checklist*, pp.3–5, helpfully outlines the issue).

Nevertheless, changing perceptions on species limits mean that the *Checklist* is already out of date, irrespective of the last seven years' crop of new species. I have compiled a list of Asian species not in the *Checklist* because split in or since 1996 (Table 2). This list of splits is by no means confirmed (this is important to emphasise); but nor is it complete (I have not, for example, tried to itemise the gulls). My guess is, however, that many (and probably the majority) of them will be adopted in due course, and their rate of accumulation is in any case worth noting—at least 155 in the seven-year period from late 1996 to late 2003. Thus before we even consider new species we have a potential growth-rate in the 'Asian list' of well over 20 species per year. This *seems* pretty fast—but in reality I suspect it may be nothing like fast enough.

Babblers vs antbirds

A flawed, flimsy but fun way to gauge the taxonomic disparity between East and West lies in a comparison of the incidence of subspecies in two groups whose ecologies are broadly equivalent, the Asian babblers Timaliidae plus parrotbills Panuridae (hereafter babblers) on the one side, and the Neotropical antbirds Thamnophilidae plus antthrushes Formicariidae

(hereafter antbirds) on the other. Both these groups are non-vagile denizens of the undergrowth and lower stories of tropical forest and other woody habitats, and therefore tend to have diversified richly within often relatively small geographic areas. Using Clements (2000) as the source—Dickinson (2003) appeared too late (see Book Reviews), although it is used in Table 2—the ratio of species to subspecies proves to be roughly 1:3 in the babblers and 1:2 in the antbirds, the ratio of monotypic to polytypic species respectively 1:2 and 1:1, and the proportion of taxa recognised at species level respectively 29.4% and 37.5% (Table 1). This disparity may simply reflect a biological circumstance based on imponderable complexities of evolution and biogeography; but it may equally reflect an increasingly narrow species-limit application by Neotropical taxonomists over time. Assuming the latter, to achieve parity with the antbirds the babblers would need to raise to species level 8.1% (37.5–29.4%) of their total taxa (82+741=823), hence 67.

Extrapolating to the wider Asian avifauna is problematic, and we must at least filter out the better-known, wider-ranging taxa such as waterfowl and shorebirds: if at least we sum the *Checklist* families Indicatoridae to Columbidae (total species, *fide Checklist*, 548), passerines (1,398), Phasianidae (111) and Accipitridae (82), we get 2,134 species from groups that commonly either inhabit wooded land or show relatively restricted ranges (and hence are vaguely comparable to our babblers). Assuming the same level of monotypy and polytypy in these species as in the babblers yields 7,257 (723+6,534) taxa; 8.1% of them leaves us with 588 ‘new’ species, and our Asian bird list total is set to sail way past the 3,000 mark.

Making a further preposterous assumption—a 100% acceptance rate of the last seven years’ proposed splits, and hence 20 splits a year—means it will take almost 30 years to add these extra species to the Asian list. Such a length of

time—and it is a minimum—is likely to be rather too long for some of us. However, we can expect a Great Leap Forward in mid-2004, with the publication of Rasmussen & Anderton’s *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide*. Pamela Rasmussen is of course a key figure in Asian bird taxonomy, and her judgements are based on painstakingly exhaustive evaluations, so although the book is a field guide its species list will have a special authority. Having worked with her on parts of the project, I know that the splits she has instituted run to many dozens, and I think her revisions point up three fairly obvious things relating to the unlumping of the Asian avifauna: the usefulness of focusing on voice, islands and mountains.

Voice, islands and mountains

Voice has long been employed as an arbiter in taxonomy, but its value in this regard has sharply increased with the increasing volume and availability of recorded material in the past 5–10 years, notably in Asia. Our new ability to download bird songs from the internet and convert them instantaneously to sonagrams demonstrates how rapid the advances in taxonomy through this medium can now be. There are of course provisos: the link to morphological analysis in museum material must remain, and small differences in voice require validation through large samples (to prevent individual variation being mistaken for a true taxonomic character). Moreover, while some groups, for example nightbirds, may possess vocalisations that are highly dependable as guides to taxonomic status, others are less certainly endowed. So we should sit up when Cleere (1998) reports that males of the four races of Javan Frogmouth *Batrachostomus javensis* all call differently; but reports of untypical songs in the Taiwan White-browed Shortwing *Brachypteryx montana goodfellowi* (OBC Bull. 30: 60) and the Enggano Chestnut-capped Thrush *Zoothera interpres leucolaema* (B. F. King verbally 1997) offer more modest encouragement, despite both forms

Table 1. Numbers of taxa in the ‘babblers’ (babblers Timaliidae and parrotbills Panuridae) which occur in the Asian region as defined by OBC, and in the ‘antbirds’ (antbirds Thamnophilidae and antthrushes Formicariidae), as derived from Clements (2000), with ratios and percentages. The values in the last column are the total species (data column one) as a percentage of the total taxa (data column six).

	No. spp	No. monotypic spp	No. polytypic spp	mono: poly spp	No. subsp of polytypic spp	Total taxa	Spp: subsp	Total spp as % total taxa
Babblers	242	82	160	1:1.9	741	823	1:3.1	29.4
Antbirds	269	128	141	1:1.1	590	718	1:2.2	37.5

1



3a



b



2a



4a



b



2b





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Captions are on page 24

Captions to plates on pages 22, 23 and 29

1. Males of the four species of cochoa. From top to bottom, Purple Cochoa *Cochoa purpurea*, Green Cochoa *C. viridis*, Sumatran Cochoa *C. beccarii* and Javan Cochoa *C. azurea*. The bottom two were treated as conspecific until separated in a popular article by Collar & Andrew (1987).
- 2a,b. Q.—How many species in these two photographs? A.—Eight. Seven *Aratinga* parakeet species from Mexico to the Andes (2a); nine subspecies of Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus* from the western end of its range (left to right: *mittelli*, *forsteni*, *djampeanus*, *fortis*, *weberi*, *capistratus*, *haematodus*, *moluccanus*, *rubritorquis*) (2b). [Only after this article went to press did Tim Inskipp draw my attention to the recent but rather obscurely published rearrangement of the lorikeet by Schodde & Mason (1997).]
- 3a,b. Dorsal (3a) and ventral (3b) views of White-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax albogularis*, nominate *albogularis* (left) and race *ruficeps* (right).
- 4a,b. Dorsal (4a) and ventral (4b) views of Hwamei *Garrulax canorus*, nominate *canorus* (left) and race *taivanus* (right).
- 5a,b. Dorsal (5a) and ventral (5b) views of female Silver Pheasant *Lophura nycthemera*, race *fokiensis* (left) and race *whiteheadi* (right).
6. Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*, races *robinsoni* (Malay Peninsula, top) and *dedemi* (Sumatra, below). Both these subspecies have atypically long bills, and are perhaps closer to each other than *robinsoni* is to other forms of *canus*.
7. Three Philippine races of Greater Flameback *Chrysocolaptes lucidus*: *haematribon* (Luzon, top), *xanthocephalus* (Western Visayas, middle) and *erythrocephalus* (Palawan, bottom).
8. Five races of Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus*, first four from left from across the range, last on right (with uniquely extended and curved tail feathers, matt plumage) *menagei* from Tablas, central Philippines.
- 9a,b. Dorsal (9a) and lateral (9b) view of four races of Rufous-winged Fulvetta *Alcippe castaneiceps*, left to right: *soror* (Malay Peninsula), *exul* (Laos), nominate (Tonkin) and *klossi* (South Annam).
- 10a,b. Dorsal (10a) and ventral (10b) view of Cutia *Cutia nipalensis*, left to right: male and female *cervinocrissa* (Malay Peninsula), and male and female *legalleni* (South Annam).
- 11a,b. Dorsal (11a) and ventral (11b) view of Grey-headed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis gularis*, race *laotianus* (Thailand, left) and *margaritae* (South Annam, right).
- 12a,b. Dorsal (12a) and lateral (12b) view of five races of Blue-winged Minla *Minla cyanouroptera*, left to right: nominate (Nepal), *sordida* (Myanmar), *wingatei* (Tonkin), *sordidior* (Malay Peninsula) and *orientalis* (South Annam).

Table 2. Asian bird species split from others since OBC's *Checklist* went to press in 1996 (listed chronologically and, within year, by alphabetical order of first authors). This is not a complete list (total 155), nor can it be assumed that all of them will gain broad acceptance (at least without fuller justification), and publication here does not represent my or OBC's automatic endorsement. Note that the list takes no account of 'lumpings' made in the same sources cited, and it may well have missed certain key Russian references where splits pre-date those sources cited here. Key sources for this list were R. A. de By's very helpful website (www.ornitaxa.com/SM/TaxChanges.html) and T. P. Inskipp's predictably comprehensive and up-to-date personal list of taxonomic deviations from Inskipp *et al.* (1996).

-
- Long-billed Murrelet *Brachyramphus perdix* (Friesen *et al.* 1996)
 - Chestnut Munia *Lonchura atricapilla* (Restall 1996)
 - Roll's Partridge *Arborophila rolli* and Sumatran Partridge *A. sumatrana* (Mees 1996)
 - Gansu Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus kansuensis* (Alström *et al.* 1997)
 - Mindanao Racquet-tail *Prioniturus waterstradti* (reaffirmed), Yellowish-breasted Racquet-tail *P. flavicans* and Sula Hanging Parrot *Loriculus sclateri* (Collar 1997)
 - Turkestan Shrike *Lanius phoenicuroides*, Daurian Shrike *L. speculigerus* and Steppe Grey Shrike *L. pallidirostris* (Lefranc 1997)
 - Caspian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus fuscus* (Leisler *et al.* 1997)
 - Philippine Drongo Cuckoo *Surniculus velutinus* and Horsfield's Cuckoo *Cuculus horsfieldi* (Payne 1997)
 - Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* (Sangster 1997)
 - Bewick's Swan *Cygnus bewickii*, Tundra Bean Goose *Anser serrirostris*, Black Brent Goose *Branta nigricans*, American Scoter *Melanitta americana* and White-winged Scoter *M. deglandi* (Sangster *et al.* 1997)
 - Scarlet-breasted Lorikeet *Trichoglossus forsteni*, Flores Lorikeet *T. weberi*, Marigold Lorikeet *T. capistratus* and Red-collared Lorikeet *T. rubritorquis* (Schodde & Mason 1997)
 - Jerdon's Bushlark *Mirafra affinis*, Burmese Bushlark *M. microptera* and Indochinese Bushlark *M. marionae* (Alström 1998)
 - Black-billed Hanging Parrot *Loriculus bonapartei* (Juniper & Parr 1998)
 - White-vented Myna *Acridotheres javanicus*, Great Myna *A. grandis*, Indian Hill Myna *Gracula indica*, Nias Hill Myna *G. robusta* and Enggano Hill Myna *G. enganensis* (Feare & Craig 1998)
 - Siao Scops Owl *Otus siaoensis* (Lambert & Rasmussen 1998)
 - Talaud Kingfisher *Todiramphus enigma* (Riley *et al.* 1998)
 - Grey-headed Swampphen *Porphyrio poliocephalus*, Philippine Swampphen *P. pulverulentus* and Black-backed Swampphen *P. indicus* (Sangster 1998)

- Grey-headed Wagtail *Motacilla thunbergi*, Black-headed Wagtail *M. feldegg*, Yellow-headed Wagtail *M. lutea*, Kamchatka Wagtail *M. simillima*, White-headed Wagtail *M. leucocephala*, Masked Wagtail *M. personata*, Himalayan Wagtail *M. alboides*, Black-backed Wagtail *M. lugens*, East Siberian Wagtail *M. ocularis*, Amur Wagtail *M. leucopsis*, Baikal Wagtail *M. baicalensis*, White's Thrush *Zoothera aurea*, Nilghiri Thrush *Z. neilgherriensis*, Sri Lanka Thrush *Z. imbricata* and Horsfield's Thrush *Z. horsfieldi* (Sangster *et al.* 1998)
- Northern Parrotbill *Paradoxornis polivanovi* (Stepanyan 1998)
- Grey-crowned Warbler *Seicercus tephrocephalus*, Whistler's Warbler *S. whistleri* and Bianchi's Warbler *S. valentini* (Alström & Olsson 1999)
- Tawitawi Brown Dove *Phapitreron cinereiceps* and Sulu Woodpecker *Dendrocopos ramsayi* (Collar *et al.* 1999)
- Manchurian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus tangorum* (Helbig *et al.* 1999)
- Andaman Masked Owl *Tyto deroepstorffi*, Eastern Grass Owl *T. longimembris*, Enggano Scops Owl *Otus enganensis*, Sunda Scops Owl *O. lempiji*, Collared Scops Owl *O. lettia*, Japanese Scops Owl *O. semitorques*, Rock Eagle Owl *Bubo bengalensis*, Bartels's Wood Owl *Strix bartelsi*, Himalayan Wood Owl *S. newarensis*, Sichuan Wood Owl *Strix davidi*, Mindoro Hawk Owl *Ninox mindorensis*, Southern Boobook *N. boobook* and Christmas Island Hawk Owl *N. natalis* (Koenig *et al.* 1999; also in part Marks *et al.* 1999)
- Sangihe Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla sanghirensis* (Rozendaal & Lambert 1999)
- Arafura Fantail *Rhipidura dryas* (Schodde & Mason 1999)
- Dulit Partridge *Rhizothera dulitensis* (Smythies & Davison 1999)
- Benguet Bush-warbler *Bradypterus seebohmi*, Javan Bush-warbler *B. montis* and Timor Bush-warbler *B. timorensis* (Dickinson *et al.* 2000)
- Green Pheasant *Phasianus versicolor* (Ornithological Society of Japan 2000)
- Sangihe White-eye *Zosterops nehrkorni* and Seram White-eye *Z. stalker* (Rasmussen *et al.* 2000)
- Malayan Partridge *Arborophila campbelli*, Siamese Partridge *A. diversa*, Scaly-breasted Partridge *A. chloropus*, Annam Partridge *A. merlini*, Rufous-backed Kingfisher *Ceyx rufidorsa*, Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus*, White-shouldered Ibis *Pseudibis davisoni*, Black-bibbed Tit *Parus hypermelaena*, Manchurian Bush Warbler *Cetta canturians*, Two-barred Warbler *Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus*, Cambodian Laughingthrush *Garrulax ferrarius*, Rufous-cheeked Laughingthrush *G. castanotis*, Orange-breasted Laughingthrush *G. annamensis*, Indochinese Fulvetta *Alcippe danisi*, Black-browed Fulvetta *A. grotei* and Black-headed Sibia *Heterophasia desgodinsi* (Robson 2000)
- Western Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga vigorsii* and Grey-breasted Spiderhunter *Arachnothera modesta* (Cheke & Mann 2001)
- Rufous-bellied Swallow *Hirundo badia* (Dekker & Dickinson 2001)
- Great Nicobar Serpent Eagle *Spilornis klossi*, Simeulue Serpent Eagle *S. abbotti*, Nias Serpent Eagle *S. asturinus*, Mentawai Serpent Eagle *S. sipora*, Natuna Serpent Eagle *S. natunensis*, Bawean Serpent Eagle *S. baweanus*, Ryukyu Serpent Eagle *S. perplexus*, Varied Goshawk *Accipiter hiogaster*, Altai Falcon *Falco altaicus* and Barbary Falcon *F. peregrinoides* (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001)
- (reaffirmed) Tickell's Brown Hornbill *Anorrhinus tickelli* (Kemp 2001)
- Slender-billed Vulture *Gyps tenuirostris* (Rasmussen & Parry 2001)
- Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis* (Sangster *et al.* 2001)
- Small Whitethroat *Sylvia minula*, Hume's Whitethroat *S. althaea*, Margelanian Whitethroat *S. margelanica* and Eastern Orphean Warbler *S. crassirostris* (Shirihai *et al.* 2001)
- Sumatran Babbler *Trichastoma buettikoferi* (Wells *et al.* 2001)
- Large-billed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orinus* (Bensch & Pearson 2002)
- Sumatran Trogon *Harpactes* (= *Apalharpactes*) *mackloti* (Collar & van Balen 2002)
- Northern Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx hyperythrus*, Philippine Hawk Cuckoo *H. pectoralis* and Hodgson's Hawk Cuckoo *H. nasicolor* (King 2002a)
- Northern Boobook *Ninox japonica* and Chocolate Boobook *N. randi* (King 2002b)
- Sykes's Warbler *Hippolais rama* (Knox *et al.* 2002)
- Black-belted Flowerpecker *Dicaeum haematostictum* and Handsome Sunbird *Aethopyga bella* (Mann 2002; former also in Collar *et al.* 1999)
- Indian Spotted Eagle *Aquila hastata* (Parry *et al.* 2002)
- Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maura* (Urquhart 2002)
- Cave Swiftlet *Collocalia linchi*, Dusky Cuckoo Dove *Macropygia magna*, Philippine Cuckoo Dove *M. tenuirostris*, Ruddy Cuckoo Dove *M. emiliana*, Barred Dove *Geopelia maugei*, Wallacean Honeyeater *Myzomela boiei*, Fulvous-tinted Whistler *Pachycephala fulvotincta*, Banda Sea Whistler *P. macrorhyncha*, Black-chinned Whistler *P. mentalis*, Black-throated Thrush *Turdus atrogularis*, Dusky Thrush *T. eunomus*, Songar Tit *Parus songarus*, Philippine Oriole *Oriolus steerii*, Red-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe chrysopygia*, Buff-chested Babbler *Stachyris ambigua*, Tibetan Snowfinch *Montifringilla henrici* and Blyth's Rosefinch *Carpodacus grandis* (Dickinson 2003)
- Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix* (Parkin *et al.* 2003)
- Western Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla werae*, Green-headed Wagtail *M. taivana* and Alaska Wagtail *M. tschutschensis* (Pavlova *et al.* 2003)
- Jerdon's Leafbird *Chloropsis jerdoni*, Bornean Leafbird *C. kinabaluensis* and Sumatran Leafbird *C. media* (Wells *et al.* 2003)

being highly distinctive in plumage, because oscine passerine songs are not entirely innate.

Many of the most taxonomically neglected birds in Asia are insular, and a good proportion of the Rasmussen splits are from Sri Lanka and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. New owls from Sulawesi, Sumba, Sangihe, the Nicobars and even—coming soon—Sri Lanka imply that such places are often far from explored, which in turn suggests that species limits in their avifaunas may have been established on relatively weak authority, and that careful scrutiny may result in significant changes. On Taiwan, might the distinctive form (rufous cap, whitish belly, shorter tail) *ruficeps* of White-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax albogularis* merit upgrading (Plate 3a,b), or the smaller, buffier, eyestripe-less form *taivanus* of Hwamei *Garrulax canorus* (Plate 4a,b)? On Hainan, what should we do with the notable Silver Pheasant *Lophura nycthemera whiteheadi* (Plate 5a,b)—indeed, how should we revise the astonishingly diverse Silver Pheasant in general? In the Greater Sundas, should we continue to tolerate the lumping of both Crested and Crestless Firebacks *L. ignita* and *L. erythrophthalma*, given the strikingly different forms *L. (i.) rufa* and *L. (e.) pyronota*, how do we treat that weird red Sumatran form *dedemi* of Grey-headed (Grey-faced) Woodpecker *Picus canus* (Plate 6), and what do we make of the Sunda Whistling Thrush *Myophonus glaucinus* and its three heterogeneous forms *glaucus*, *borneensis* and *castaneus*? And what of the taxa that hang by a thread, such as Visayan Amethyst Brown Dove *Phapitreron amethystina maculipectus* (Baptista *et al.* 1996, Gibbs *et al.* 2001), Visayan Greater Flameback *Chrysocolaptes lucidus xanthocephalus* (Plate 7), Tablas Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus menagei* (Plate 8), and the Mangrove Blue Flycatchers *Cyornis rufigastra djampeana* and *C. r. kalaoensis* on the tiny islands of Tanahjampea and Kalao (Coates & Bishop 1987)?

Mountain ranges are islands of another sort. I have a single example, drawn to my attention long ago by Jon Eames: the Da Lat Plateau ('South Annam') Endemic Bird Area in Vietnam (see Stattersfield *et al.* 1998). Rufous-winged Fulvetta *Alcippe castaneiceps* has a representative there without a rufous wing, brownish not blackish wing-coverts, and blackish not chestnut crown (Plate 9a,b). *Cutia Cutia nipalensis* has a race *lagellani* which differs in several striking characters—much narrower, more even and very complete barring on pure white undersides, shorter rufous uppertail-coverts, and (in the female) a brownish crown with silvery ear-coverts

(Plate 10a,b). In both these cases Eames (2002) has recently found apparently intermediate taxa, but I still feel the situation warrants scrutiny. It certainly does with Grey-headed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis gularis*, a fairly uniform species throughout its range until it reaches South Annam, where its representative *margaritae* sports an all-black crown, all-white chin, mottled ear-coverts, whiter undersides and darker uppersides (Plate 11a,b). Finally there is the riddling Blue-winged Minla *Minla cyanouroptera*, whose race *orientalis* is not blue-winged (or not very), and which indeed has lost almost all traces of blue about its person (Plate 12a,b); so, however, has another form, *sordidior* from the Malaysian Peninsula, and any revision of the species is likely to take considerable time.

No pain, no gain

This last point is all the more galling now, when everything is so urgent and resources so limited, especially if we contemplate the breathtaking nonchalance with which some of the more debatable taxonomic decisions were made in the past. The egregious lumpings of Storm's Stork and Woolly-necked Stork, Sumatran Ground Cuckoo *Carpococcyx viridis* and Bornean Ground Cuckoo *C. radiatus* (see Collar & Long 1996) and Sumatran Cochoa and Javan Cochoa all took place, so far as I am aware, without a word of justification. This appears to have been fairly standard procedure; the most one could expect would be a commentary relaying a cursory and openly arbitrary assessment, as, for example, in the unification of the *Eurylaimus* (*Sarcophanops*) broadbills of the Philippines, recently re-separated by Lambert (1996), which took Delacour and Mayr (1945) one short sentence to account for, thus:

Although differing clearly in size and color, the two Philippine forms *steerei* [sic] and *samarensis* are in our opinion subspecies of one species.

Giants and heroes of ornithology these two authors may be, but they would never get that kind of thing into *Forktail* today! It is not that opinion is unacceptable, of course—quite the contrary, for all taxonomic decisions about species involving allopatric forms require opinion. It is rather that the opinion must be informed by as much mutually supportive evidence as possible and appropriate (acoustic, morphological, molecular), properly analysed and coherently argued, in order that the decision reached can command the fullest understanding and endorsement.

So despite my sense that the Asian avifauna is overlumped, and despite the urgency with which it needs to be unlumped, it is important that the process of review involve the rigorous evaluation of characters and the application of consistent standards of judgement. One of the reasons that any new arrangements need to be stable and defensible, and therefore based on full evaluations of the evidence, is that we may expect them to translate ever more frequently into national and international law. Indeed it is in our interests to ensure that this happens: when Storm's Stork and Bornean Peacock Pheasant *Polyplectron schleiermacheri* were recognised as distinct species, Indonesia was suddenly left with just Woolly-necked Stork and Malaysian Peacock Pheasant *P. malacense* on its list of protected species, in theory allowing free trade in the new splits (R. Sözer *in litt.* 1999).

In my first 'Letter from the Chairman' (OBC Bull. 29: 3) I mentioned that Council had formally endorsed my idea of establishing an OBC Taxonomic Committee in order to lead on the

revisions in the Asian avifauna that I sense we need. However, it proved very hard to take forward, partly because of logistics and personnel, but mostly because of the sheer scale of the problem. The examples I give above—none of which have certain outcomes—illustrate the dimensions of the challenge. Whether there are as many as (some would say as few as) 600 splits to be made in Asia or not, I think that all OBC can do at this stage is to push the agenda with individuals and institutions that are better placed to take up the challenge (I should mention here the recent Dekker & Dickinson initiative 'Systematic notes on Asian birds' in the Dutch journal *Zoologische Verhandelingen*), and contribute by publishing reviews of taxa in *Forktail*. Of course, anyone with a good camera, good recording equipment and the will to keep accurate records of encounters with birds in less visited places (see Box panel) can play a part—and it would be satisfying to think that this might include a good proportion of the OBC membership.

How birdwatchers in less visited areas can help in taxonomic work

All the suggestions below assume that national laws permit the actions in question

- Tape vocalisations of birds and deposit recordings with one or more established centres such as the British Library National Sound Archive (with details on the circumstance of each item) (contact richard.ranft@bl.uk)
- Take photographs of birds and their nests and deposit copies with recognised institutions or post them on the internet (photographs are invaluable reference material for things like eye colour and posture)
- Keep detailed notes on behaviour, displays, choice of nest site and material, foraging habits and seasonality, and when appropriate publish (or otherwise make available) these in an accessible place such as *Forktail*
- Preserve and deposit all or parts of bird specimens and their disused nests in the respective national museum or an appropriate alternative institution

Acknowledgements

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The Saemangeum reclamation: more delays, more opportunities...

One of Asia's most pressing conservation issues, the reclamation of 40,100 ha of tidal flat and shallows on South Korea's west coast, has reached, yet another crucial stage.

As many members of the Oriental Bird Club will already know, the entire Saemangeum reclamation project – which as proposed would barrage two free-flowing rivers with a 33 km sea-wall – was halted by a Korean court on 15 July, 2003. Judge Kang Young-ho ruled that irrigation water to come from the proposed huge reclamation reservoirs would be too polluted by upstream contaminants for agricultural use, rendering the project's meaning illegitimate and the costs required to clean it up far in excess of those claimed by the government.

As expected, the Ministry most responsible for wanting the reclamation to continue, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), launched an immediate appeal, with a major hearing to be held on 31 October, and a final decision on Saemangeum's future to be reached probably early next year. While this delay gives MAF more time to gather 'expert' witnesses (including it is said Prof Bart Schultz, the Dutch former head of the International Academy of Irrigation and Water Supply), it also gives groups opposed to the reclamation more opportunities to publicise this disastrous project and to coordinate *their* arguments.

Only a few months ago, before *BBC World* broadcast its hard-hitting 'Hard Dyke' documentary in early July, few people inside or outside of South Korea really understood the global importance of Saemangeum (with the notable exception of active conservationists like OBC's Dr Nigel Collar! – see below), but the situation is now very different, and MAF are increasingly finding themselves up against some formidable opponents.

Within South Korea, the Korean Federation for Environmental Movement (KFEM), has opposed the project for many years. In recent months, it has stepped up its efforts and held open fora attracting great publicity and contributions from respected Korean professors including Oh Chang Hwan – who argues that the eco-tourism value of the area is higher than any gain in short-term jobs.

Outside South Korea, since the July court ruling, WBKEnglish has helped organise with KFEM protest visits to the South Korean Embassies in the UK, Australia, and Japan by a broad range of organisations (including ourselves, OBC, BirdLife International, RSPB, Friends of the Earth, Japan Wetlands Action Network, and WWF), hosted an online petition, and in a potentially highly significant initiative posted an online rebuttal of MAF's arguments for continuation of the reclamation (at <<http://www.wbkenglish.com/MAFrebuttal.asp>>).

Written to counter the embarrassingly weak and unscientific arguments put forward by MAF on their official website, this report looks in detail at how large-scale reclamation affects waterbirds, and counters the claims that MAF's project is 'environmentally friendly' and will impact neither on the 26 species of waterbird that occur in the Saemangeum estuarine system in internationally important concentrations, nor on the 400,000 shorebirds that currently are supported there.

The report has benefited from considerable expert input from several highly respected wetland and bird specialists, including Dr David Wells (ex-head of the Asian Wetland Bureau as well as a leading figure in Oriental ornithology), and is presently being translated by KFEM for use in pushing for the complete cancellation of the project – on the grounds of its impact on migratory waterbirds.

Further adding to MAF's woes, a bilateral migratory bird agreement will soon be concluded between South Korea and Australia. Announced by the Hon Dr David Kemp, Australian Minister of State for the Environment and Heritage, in a letter to KFEM about Saemangeum, the Migratory Bird Agreement will have as its focus 'shared' migratory bird species (i.e. shorebirds). As South Korea is already a signatory to both the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity, it is becoming increasingly difficult for MAF and others to ignore South Korea's international obligations while trying to justify destroying one of the world's most important wetlands in the pursuit of 'national interests'.

And important it certainly is. The Saemangeum estuarine system supports the largest known concentration of staging shorebirds in the Yellow Sea, with internationally significant

concentrations of both Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* and Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmeus*. Many of these are already considered to be in decline, primarily due to loss of estuarine habitat through reclamation in the Yellow Sea and neighbouring Japan. A survey this summer on Russia's Chukotsk Peninsula, for example, has found an alarming recent decline in nesting Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The survey team estimated that the breeding population of this most charismatic shorebird may now only number between 300 and 500 pairs (Pavel Tomkovich in press). In just four visits to Saemangeum this September, at least 15 Spoon-billed Sandpipers were seen, including one juvenile banded this summer at the nest. In addition, 6–8 Nordmann's Greenshank (a species that peaks in October) were also seen. Allowing for turnover rates of shorebirds at staging sites (and the sheer size of the area) it is clear that the Saemangeum estuarine system still remains one of the most important staging sites for these species in the world.

More and more birdwatchers, activists, and researchers are joining the campaign to stop the reclamation, and a number of further international actions are being considered to help

raise awareness and to increase the pressure on MAF. This is truly one battle that conservationists must win. If the project were restarted, the reclamation of Saemangeum would not only spell disaster for regional fisheries and the birds and fisherfolk directly dependent upon the area; it would also clearly signal South Korea's grim determination to ignore its obligations to international conventions, and its continuing acceptance of environmental decline as a small price to pay for short-term profit and 'development'.

Charlie and Nial Moores, No. 1207, 101 Dong, Samik Daeyon Beach Apart 1808, Daeyon 3-Dong, nam-Gu, Buson Coty, South Korea.

For further details and to sign our petition, please visit the WBKEnglish website at <<http://www.wbkenglish.com>>

On 19 August 2003 Nigel Collar, Chairman of OBC, wrote to Dr Yoon Young-Kwan, Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs & Trade for South Korea to petition for the cancellation of the Saemangeum Reclamation Project as ruled by a Korean court on 15 July 2003. The full text of that letter is printed below. – Eds.



Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides*. This highly endangered species is an occasional visitor to the Saemangeum area. Photo by Frank Todd.



Oriental Bird Club

c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL, UK

His Excellency Mr Lee Tae-Sik
Embassy of the Republic of Korea
60 Buckingham Gate
London SW1E 6AJ

19 August 2003

THE INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF SAEMANGEUM

For attention: Dr Yoon Young-Kwan, Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs & Trade

Your Excellency

The estuarine system in your country known as Saemangeum is the single most important stop-over site for migratory shorebirds along the East Asia flyway connecting the Arctic to Australia. Your government's current 'reclamation project' at the site reveals its most unfortunate failure to recognise the *international* significance of the area as a biological phenomenon. I therefore request you to pass this letter to your government in order to secure the immediate cancellation of the project.

No fewer than 26 species of waterbird occur every year in the Saemangeum system in concentrations recognised by the Ramsar Convention, to which your government has been a party since 28 March 1997, as 'internationally important'. These species, some of which (in bold) are internationally red-listed as in danger of extinction, are:

Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*

Bean Goose *Anser fabalis* (race *middendorfi*)

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* (race *frontalis*)

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Baikal Teal *Anas formosa*

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* (race *dealbatus*)

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* (race *melanuiroides*)

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* (race *variegatus*)

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquatus* (race *orientalis*)

Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*

Grey-tailed Tattler *Heterosceles brevipes*

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*

Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* (races *arctica* / *sakhalina*)

Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmeus*

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*

Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris*

Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi*

Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*

The numbers in the Saemangeum system of any *one* of these species in the East Asian flyway qualify the site as one of international importance, and the presence of six globally threatened species on this list is of the greatest significance (hundreds of biologists are working internationally to secure the future of these species). However, in addition to this compelling evidence, there are a further six species of bird of immense international importance which occur irregularly in the Saemangeum system. These species, all of which are internationally red-listed as in danger of extinction (I retain my use of bold for emphasis and consistency), are:

Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor*

Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides*

White-naped Crane *Grus vipio*

Hooded Crane *Grus monacha*

Red-crowned Crane *Grus japonensis*

Relict Gull *Larus relictus*

Here, then, are 32 solid reasons to abandon the Saemangeum Reclamation Project. These lists confirm the right of people internationally to be deeply concerned and distressed at your government's intentions. Not only have there been major domestic protests against this environmentally catastrophic initiative, but BBC World has screened a documentary on the impact of the project, and the US, Australian and New Zealand media have all registered the cause as one of major international interest.

As a party to the Ramsar Convention, your government has committed itself to the 'wise use of wetlands' in its territory, which is defined as 'their sustainable utilisation for the benefit of human kind *compatible with the maintenance of the natural properties of the ecosystem*' (my italics). In 1999 your government actually sponsored and proposed a resolution (7.21) which urges parties 'to review and modify existing policies that adversely affect intertidal wetlands, [and] to seek to introduce measures for the long-term conservation of these areas'. Your government now needs to observe its own resolution with regard to Saemangeum, whose intertidal flats will be irreversibly affected, and in essence destroyed, by the reclamation project.

I therefore want to emphasise to you, as clearly as possible, that the preservation or loss of the Saemangeum estuarine system is not merely a domestic issue, as your government has, up to now, insisted, but is also an international one of very real dimensions. The world is watching your country now for evidence of its readiness to observe its international obligations under the Ramsar Convention. On behalf of the Oriental Bird Club, which represents the interests of birdwatchers, nature lovers, conservationists and environmentalists throughout the Orient (and in whose forthcoming *Bulletin* this letter will be published in full), I respectfully petition your government—in the form of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade—to accept the recent court ruling against the Saemangeum Reclamation Project, and to cancel it.

Yours sincerely

Dr N. J. Collar
Chairman, Oriental Bird Club



Little-known Oriental Bird

Courtois's Laughingthrush *Garrulax galbanus courtoisi*

After seven years of effort, Courtois's Laughingthrush *Garrulax galbanus courtoisi*, hitherto only known from two museum specimens collected in 1919, was 'rediscovered' in 2000 at its type locality, Wuyuan, Jiangxi Province, China. Unlike most other laughingthrushes studied to date, *Garrulax galbanus courtoisi* nests in loose colonies. More intriguing still is that despite intensive survey efforts covering all types of habitats, the bird has so far only been found in stands of old village trees, which villagers in this part of China have protected for generations. Only some 150–160 surviving birds are known to date, making this taxon one of the rarest birds in the world, and one whose survival up to now and well into the future may be dependent on a regional tradition of protecting old village trees.

Efforts, both domestic and international, to rediscover Courtois's Laughingthrush, a subspecies of Yellow-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax galbanus*, at its type locality have continued for years but have now finally shown some dramatic and positive results. Furthermore, data recently obtained on the status and breeding behaviour of this heretofore unstudied bird is demonstrating to us something more than mere taxonomy.

For the whole story of the discovery of the bird, a British topographical surveyor, Colonel Godwin-Austen, constitutes the very beginning. In 1874, Colonel Godwin-Austen described a new species of laughingthrush, *Garrulax galbanus*, based on skins he obtained in February 1873 in the Manipur valley, eastern Assam, India,¹ from which area the species is now mostly known by its English name, the Yellow-throated Laughingthrush. Later on, in 1923, M. A. Ménégaux, President of the Société Ornithologique de France, recognised another laughingthrush species, *Garrulax courtoisi*, based on two bird skins collected in September 1919 by a French missionary Père Arnous Riviere, from Wuyuan in south-east China and sent to him by Père F. Courtois.^{2,3} And, although the direct distance from Manipur to Wuyuan is at least 2,000 kilometres, and no record of either of the two birds had been reported at any site between the two localities at that time, *courtoisi* was nevertheless soon after relegated to the status of a subspecies of *Garrulax galbanus*.⁴

More than half a century then passed before in 1982 two Chinese ornithologists, Prof. Cheng Tso-hsin and Tang Rui-chang, described one more subspecies of *galbanus*, and since the three specimens were collected at Simao in Yunnan Province, south-west China, the new subspecies

was named *simaoensis*.⁵ Therefore, three subspecies of the Yellow-throated Laughingthrush have so far been recognised – the nominate form distributed in the area where the Indian sub-continent meets Indochina, and the other two in mainland China. Although Simao lies more or less between Manipur and Wuyuan, it is apparent that the Yellow-throated Laughingthrush shows a completely allopatric pattern in the ranges of its three subspecies (see fig. 1).^{6,7}

It is now known that the nominate form, whose type locality is Manipur, can also be found in a relatively large surrounding area, including the Chin Hills of western Myanmar (Burma) and also as far afield as a small area in southern Bangladesh.^{8,9} According to Smythies, it is locally 'a common breeding bird of the Chin Hills at 5,000–6,000 feet from mid-April to early June'.^{10,11} In contrast, nothing new came to be known of either a geographical or ethological nature about the two Chinese subspecies. In fact, until our recent success, no-one, neither professional ornithologist nor keen birdwatcher, had reported having so much as seeing a *courtoisi* or *simaoensis*, whether in their type localities or elsewhere, since the type specimens were collected in 1919 and 1956, respectively. This implied that they were restricted to a rather small area, and/or in a rather specific habitat, and/or had been reduced to very small surviving numbers – all of which have proven to be true for *courtoisi*. *Simaoensis* has yet to be rediscovered.

It should be noted, however, that their elusiveness in the wild notwithstanding, there are several populations of Yellow-throated Laughingthrush in European collections, which apparently are self-sustaining,¹¹ and some bird keepers believe that the birds they have are of the subspecies *simaoensis*.¹² If the birds are *simaoensis*,

it is far from clear how they could have reached Europe, and from whence they came. An exhaustive search of all original customs documents relating to passerine birds exported from China revealed no record of Yellow-throated Laughingthrush.

When, in the early 1990s, concern as to the status of the two forms of the bird occurring in mainland China grew, the German conservation organisation Zoologische Gesellschaft für Arten und Populationsschutz (ZGAP) provided some small grants to its Chinese colleagues to investigate the status of wild populations of the bird, hopefully including both *courtoisi* and *simaoensis*. It required successive field surveys over a period of seven years before *courtoisi* was finally rediscovered in the wild in Wuyuan, Jiangxi, during the 2000 breeding season.

During our field observations in 2000, a total of 80–90 birds were counted, which were found in two breeding flocks approximately 40 km apart. Although we obtained some basic ethological knowledge and a rudimentary understanding of the breeding biology and habitat selection of the bird, all we could really say about the current status of this taxon was that it was extremely rare, leaving many uncertainties. However, following fieldwork in 2001, when two more breeding sites of *courtoisi* were found, a relatively more

integrated picture has emerged, making it possible to outline, even if still only sketchily, the breeding range and status of the bird in Wuyuan County.

Briefly, the birds are found at an altitude of less than 100 m, breeding in flocks, choosing their breeding sites close to a river, nesting in the canopy of big trees, and all four breeding flocks found to date are situated around villages, and very close to villagers' houses (see figs 3–4). This close association between the birds and human habitation is remarkable. It is well established that most laughingthrushes nest in bushes, shrubs, or tall grasses rather than large trees, and breed in relatively isolated pairs rather than colonies, as indeed is reported for nominate *galbanus*.¹³ But *courtoisi* seems to confound all that we thought we knew about laughingthrushes. In fact, although we had thought we had surveyed all the potential habitats available for this laughingthrush in Wuyuan County in previous years, we failed to find any trace of the bird. However, while we were counting and identifying the large, old trees occurring around villages in 2000, the bird was suddenly, and very surprisingly, right in front of us!

In our 2001 field season, more than 20 *courtoisi* nests were located, and all of them were sited in the canopy of mature trees. The trees the birds



Figure 1. Map showing location of Simao and Wuyuan County.



mostly favour as nesting sites are the Chinese Sweet Gum *Liquidambar formosana/taiwaniana* and the Camphor *Cinnamomum camphora*, while others include *Pterocarya stenoptera*, *Aphananthe aspera*, and the conifer *Cunninghamia lanceolata*. It therefore appears that these centuries-old large trees are providing crucial, if not indeed obligate, habitat for the continued successful reproduction of this rare bird.

Geo-morphologically, Wuyuan County's landscape consists mainly of montane areas rising from 35 m at the base of hills to over 1,600 m at the mountain tops. The small basins and plains lower than 200 m are quite heavily populated. Today over 70% of the county is still covered by forests and woods, albeit these are rarely original but rather secondary forest or even plantations. It can be safely inferred that in the past there were much more extensive primary subtropical evergreen forest and wood communities present. It appears that Courtois's Laughingthrush needs large, mature trees which formerly must have been common, as presumably was this taxon. Considering other features of the breeding habitats that *courtoisi* seems to require, such as a low altitude and proximity to a river, the conclusion might be drawn that, in present times in Wuyuan, only the outskirts of villages can satisfy all of the species's requirements.



2 Courtois's Laughingthrush *Garrulax galbanus courtoisi*. 18 April 2003, Wuyuan, Jiangxi province, China. Photo by Yu Yat-Tung.
3 & 4 Fung shui woods, Wuyuan, Jiangxi Province, China, 2003 - breeding site of Courtois's Laughingthrush *Garrulax galbanus courtoisi*. Photos by Dickson Wong.

It is a pity that in his original paper describing *Garrulax courtoisi*, Ménégaux failed to mention the exact location, or at least the type of habitat, or even the altitude from which the two skins were collected. Nevertheless, considering the difficulties of travel in 1919 when Père Arnous was visiting Wuyuan, the two birds would more likely than not have been obtained at a site not very far from the central town of the county, or at least along, or close to, the old countryside road, though the intrepid Father may have ventured further afield in his botanical quests. La Touche quotes Courtois as saying that the birds 'frequented brushwood in flocks, fairly numerous but wild'.³

It is noteworthy that Courtois's Laughingthrushes breed at so low an altitude, especially when compared with the nominate form, which usually lives well above 1,000 m in India.^{10,11,14,15,16} It is interesting to speculate whether the subspecies *courtoisi* has evolved some form of obligate relationship with human settlements during the breeding season, or whether their current breeding sites are simply a consequence of the fact that the only large, old trees now left occur around villages.

Our censuses in Wuyuan in 2000 and 2001 found 80–90 birds in two flocks, and 150–160 individuals in four flocks respectively. Quite possibly, there are more breeding sites in Wuyuan that we have not yet found. Even if this proves to be the case, however, our best estimate would still put the total population at probably fewer than 1,000 individuals, but conceivably up to a maximum of 1,500 although this is considered to be unlikely – if heretofore undiscovered flocks are utilising the same breeding habitats as the four already located. Such a small likely total population size is a matter of concern.

The species *Garrulax galbanus*, when treated as a whole, is globally classified as Near Threatened (NT).^{17,18} However, this categorisation seems more likely to be based entirely on the nominate form, *galbanus*, which occurs in a much larger range than its Chinese conspecifics and at a minimum of 16 separate known locations.⁹ Even though the available data on *courtoisi* are still quite limited, enough is known to draw some tentative conclusions as to its status – given the fact that the known birds are now totally in one local population, with 150–160 individuals and in one small area only. In accordance with the latest version of the IUCN Red List Criteria 2000,¹⁷ the subspecies *courtoisi* certainly qualifies as Endangered (EN), and quite possibly even Critically Endangered (CR), given its presumed

population size and the range it actually seems to occupy. For example, of the four breeding sites of this taxon which have been located, none is larger than 10 ha in total size, which shows how phenomenally circumscribed the breeding territory of this relict subspecies has become.

The results of our exhaustive field searches reveal that the first, and for a long time also the only, record of Courtois's Laughingthrush, though nearly a century old, is by no means an incidental one. There has evidently long been a very small, remnant population of the bird tenaciously surviving in Wuyuan – and only Wuyuan.

In the last 10 years, the local authorities and government in Wuyuan County have been making constant efforts in conservation, including the delimiting of so-called Mini-Protected Areas (MPAs), with ranges varying from a few hectares to hundreds of hectares or even more. When field studies on *courtoisi* were initiated, more than 180 MPAs had already been established, which cover a remarkable portion of the territory of Wuyuan and should bode well for the future of the birds. For instance, the first two breeding groups we found were both in MPAs. One MPA, no larger than 5 ha in total, not only supports *courtoisi* but also has a bird community of fairly high diversity. Other breeding species include Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*, Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos canicapillus*, Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis*, Asian Barred Owlet *Glaucidium cuculoides*, Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*, Black Baza *Aviceda leuphotes*, Chinese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter soloensis*, Pied Falconet *Microhierax melanoleucos*, Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*, Grey Treepie *Dendrocitta formosae*, Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*, Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*, Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula*, Oriental Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis*, and Red-billed Starling *Sturnus sericeus*. Some of these are also considered to be threatened bird species.

There is still much to be learned, both about and from this small population. For example, we still know nothing about where they go and what they do during the long non-breeding season. As soon as nestlings fledge all the birds, both adult and young, leave their breeding sites, disappearing into the low hills. And as to what we can learn from this pertinacious laughingthrush, perhaps most importantly it will afford us an excellent opportunity to study the long-term viability, genetic and otherwise, of such an extremely diminutive and tightly circumscribed population. The rediscovery of

courtoisi in the wild in Wuyuan also teaches us something of the true significance of Mini-Protected Areas for local/regional conservation efforts. With the support of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) China Program, two more MPAs are being designated and will soon be in operation. Run jointly by the local authority and with the involvement of the local community, these two new MPAs will raise the hope of ensuring the well-being of all four breeding flocks.

We cannot conclude without mentioning the uncertain taxonomic position of the bird. We find this ever more confusing, but yet something that must certainly be tackled in the future. Perhaps ethological differences from the nominate form will prove more salient than morphological considerations in determining the most logical taxonomic status of this seemingly unique laughingthrush. Knowing and keeping all that in mind, the subspecies *simaoensis* will definitely be our next target. For us, these two endemic Chinese taxa remain a mystery, and a challenge.

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Captions to plates on p. 40

- 5–6 Courtois's Laughingthrush *Garrulax galbanus courtoisi*. Wuyuan, Jiangxi Province, China, 2003. Photos by Xi Zhi-nong.
- 7 Courtois's Laughingthrush *Garrulax galbanus courtoisi*. Watercolour by Dave Showler. See page 84 for details of how to purchase this painting. Half of the proceeds of the sale will be donated to the OBC Conservation Fund by the artist.



Record congregation of Relict Gull *Larus relictus* during the migration season

Introduction

The Relict Gull *Larus relictus* is classified by BirdLife International as being Vulnerable.¹ The population of this species has been estimated to number approximately 12,000 individuals.² It is known to breed at a few isolated colonies in eastern Kazakhstan (two localities), Russia (one), Mongolia (several), and Inner Mongolia (two colonies on the Ordos plateau).¹ There are few descriptions of this species in the non-breeding season and its main wintering range has not yet been discovered,³ although small numbers are known to winter in South Korea and there are records to suggest that large numbers move to the east coast of China;⁴ small numbers may also winter inland.¹

The Tianjin Paleocoastal and Wetlands National Nature Reserve

From February 2003, the College of Life Sciences of Beijing Normal University and the Management Office of Tianjin Paleocoastal and Wetlands National Nature Reserve began a joint project to conduct bird surveys in the reserve to determine the compositions of avian communities there. Located on the western coast of Bohai Bay, Tianjin Paleocoastal and Wetlands National Nature Reserve was established in 1992 with the aim of protecting Paleocoasts (physical traces of China's ancient coastline formed between 600 and 4,700 years ago along the west bank of Bohai Bay), oyster reefs, formed between 2,000 and 7,000 years

ago, and wetland resources including lagoons (see fig. 1). The reserve's core areas and buffer zones are located within an area encompassing five districts in Tianjin Municipality (99,000 ha); Tanggu, Hangu, Dagang, Jinnan, and Dongli, as well as Ninghe county. The area of the seven selected core areas and buffer zones within the Tianjin reserve is 10,000 ha. One of the reserve buffer zones covers the coast from Hangu district to Tanggu district, and forms an important staging post for migrating waterbirds, including Relict Gull. Relict Gulls have been recorded by several researchers and birdwatchers in Bohai Bay, such as on Happy Island⁴ and at Beidaihe.⁵

Field survey

We arrived at Chentougu (39°07'20"N, 117°46'10"E) at 06h30 on 27 March 2003, half an hour after high tide. Many gulls were present along the water's edge on the extensive beach and with the aid of a telescope good views were obtained. The blackish head with 'hooded' appearance, broad but broken white eye-ring and distinctive black bars on the primary feathers indicated that large numbers of Relict Gulls were present. To obtain a better view and an accurate count, we moved to another site named Tsingtuozi (39°08'40"N, 117°47'10"E), which is at the south-west tip of the buffer zone of the nature reserve. Eventually, a total of 1,645 Relict Gulls was counted in this area. Other gulls present included Yellow-legged Gull *L. cachinnans*, Mew Gull *L. canus* and Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus*. These moved to fishponds nearby for feeding during high tide, whilst the Relict Gulls remained, floating on the water. About 1% of the Relict Gulls were in second-winter plumage and the rest were adults.

Conclusion

Since the largest number of Relict Gulls previously recorded from a stopover site was 865 on Happy Island, Hebei Province, on 12 September 1994,⁴ the 1,645 Relict Gulls recorded at Tianjin Paleocoastal and Wetlands National Nature Reserve represents the largest congregation of this species during the migration season, indicating the importance of this site for the conservation of this threatened species. As large numbers of Relict Gulls regularly occur on the west coast of Bohai in spring and autumn, and since the southern

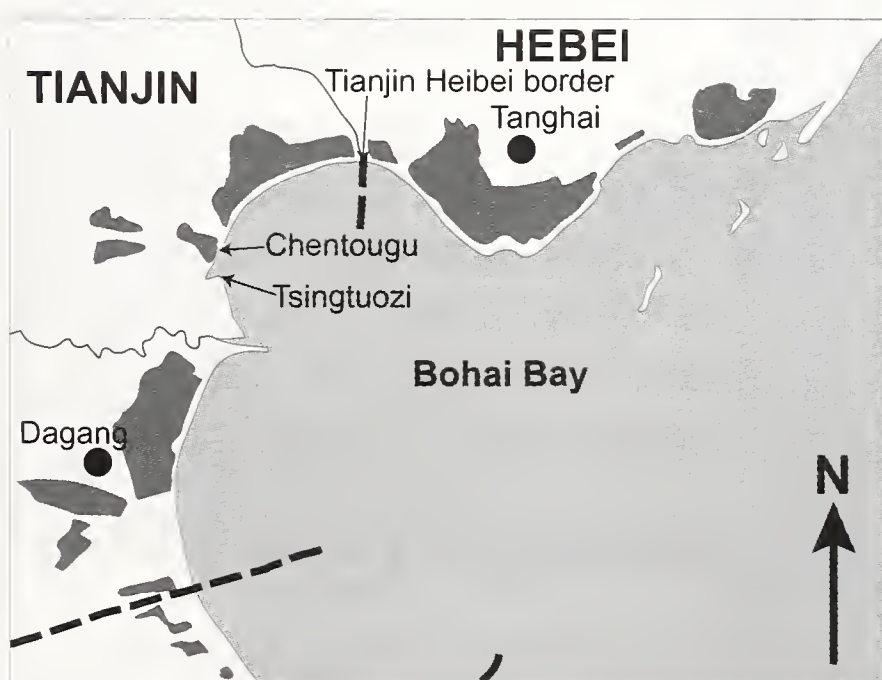


Figure 1. Map showing locations mentioned in the text.

coast of Bohai is not frozen in the winter, we suspect that Relict Gulls may winter on parts of the coast of the Yellow Sea; however, more field surveys are required to reveal whether this is the case. These surveys are especially urgent considering the threats the Yellow Sea is facing due to its burgeoning human population, resulting in heavy pollution, unsustainable harvesting of shellfish and other natural resources, and the threat of reclamation of 43% of the remaining intertidal area.⁶

Acknowledgements

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For photos of Relict Gull see p. 53 and p. 63.

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Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata* – the elusive bird of the Sundarbans, Bangladesh

It was dusk when I was coming back to my research camp after surveying for signs of tiger in the mangroves of the Sundarbans of Bangladesh on 17 January 2003 (see fig. 1). I was on a small boat in one of the creeks, during the low tide, facing a rising full moon in the sky. My attention was captured by the romantic reflection of the moon on the water. The fronds of the Nipa Palm *Nypa fruticans* – very similar to that of the Coconut Palm – were ‘clapping’ in the breeze coming in from the Bay of Bengal, making a mystical kind of music. Suddenly, among the trunks of the nipa, foraging along the bank, I spied a grebe-like bird. It was the size of a duck, but the enveloping darkness made it difficult to see clearly. I took out my camera, attached a flashgun to it, and started approaching closer in the boat. The bird was smart. It walked up to the muddy bank and stood silently inside a bush, as though challenging my patience. I told my boatman to move the boat away a bit so that the bird might reappear. It only took twenty minutes. The bird came down to the water and started looking for food again. I started following it, waiting for an opportunity to see it in open water. Half an hour later, when all the potential locations of food had

been checked out, the bird started swimming across the creek to the opposite bank, finally allowing me the good look that I had been waiting for. In the flooding moonlight, I easily recognised the bird – a female Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata*. I immediately focused the lens and released the shutter. The sudden flash from the flashgun terrified the bird and it half-ran, half-flew on the water surface, uttering a harsh keek-keek-keek call, and disappeared from sight. From my previous observations, I knew that the Masked Finfoot prefers to feed in the late afternoon and early morning, during the low tide, but this was the first-ever observation of its feeding in darkness. The species’s diet mainly comprises aquatic insects, small crabs, etc.

The Masked Finfoot is one of the rarest and least known birds in the world and is only found in a few pockets of wetland habitat in the Oriental Region.¹ On the Indian Subcontinent, it is found only in the Sundarbans and in parts of Assam. In Bangladesh, the only site where this bird is found is the Sundarbans. It has been classified as a ‘scarce’² or ‘fairly common’³ species. Previous reports on the occurrence of this species in the northern, eastern and coastal regions of Bangladesh⁴ were probably hypothetical.¹ This elusive species has a very small, declining population as a result of loss and degradation of wetlands and lowland forests. Globally, it has been categorised as a Vulnerable species by the IUCN,⁵ while in Bangladesh it is an Endangered species.⁶ The Masked Finfoot is a brownish bird with yellowish bill and legs. The male has a prominent black throat and foreneck while the female has a white throat and foreneck surrounded by a prominent black border.

Perhaps the best habitat for the species in its global range are the mangroves of the Sundarbans – a tidal swamp of about 10,000 km² in the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta of Bangladesh and India. Based on my field observations I estimate that there might be a few hundred birds living in the Sundarbans. The species avoids strong sunlight and hence is rarely seen. Most of my sightings were of solitary individuals, but a small number of pairs was also seen, with females being more commonly encountered than males. Birds were



Figure 1: Map showing location of the Sundarbans, Bangladesh.

usually seen in the same creeks, indicating that they are probably territorial. They rarely fly, and when they do, it is only a few feet above the water. The flight, however, is very fast. When alarmed, the species prefers to hide in the bushes on the bank of the creek and on a few occasions I was able to observe birds resting inside these bushes, sitting on the ground, in this manner.

The breeding of this species is poorly known on the Indian Subcontinent. It has been described both as a resident and as a winter visitor.^{7,8} Although I did not see any nest, I did see them all through the year (most likely the same individuals). I am sure that they are resident birds, at least in the Sundarbans. From my interviews with the local people, I discovered that a young man had found a nest of the Masked Finfoot in Ghagramari, northern Sundarbans, in the monsoon (June/July) of 1999. The nest was in a dense forest, on a dead tree slightly above the creek. There were eight longish, ashy-white eggs with small dark blotches. He had collected the eggs and attempted to hatch them by using a domestic hen to incubate them. Four out of the eight eggs had hatched. The hatchlings were yellow with a slight black tinge. However, they died soon afterwards.

It appears that the Masked Finfoots of the Sundarbans are safe, because there is no major threat to them or their habitat. However, the population should be monitored regularly. There is an urgent need to study the ecology and behaviour of this elusive species in order to achieve the baseline information necessary for its long-term management.

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Captions to plates on p. 45

- 1 Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata* Krabi, Thailand. Photo by Martin Hale.
- 2 A creek in the mangroves of the Sundarbans – typical habitat for the Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata*. Sundarbans East Wildlife Sanctuary, Bangladesh, 21 Apr 2002. Photo by M. Monirul H. Khan.
- 3 A female Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata* on the bank of a creek. Sundarbans East Wildlife Sanctuary, Bangladesh, 6 Feb 2002. Photo by M. Monirul H. Khan.

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Captions for 1-3 on opposite page.

A strategy for the conservation of Asia's birds and habitats

(The English names used in this article are those in *Saving Asia's threatened birds: a guide for government and civil society* and not those in the OBC Checklist – Eds.)

Threatened birds of Asia: the BirdLife International Red Data Book was published in 2001, after seven years of intensive research by the BirdLife Asia Partnership, involving about 160 national and regional compilers and more than 1,000 other contributors. This huge two-volume book is difficult to distribute because of its size and weight, but publication on CD-ROM and a website (www.rdb.or.id) means that the detailed information that it contains is now widely available. It is already having a major influence on ornithology and conservation in the region, for example it is cited 10 times in the latest volume of *Forktail*, and it is referred to in many applications to OBC's Conservation Fund. A new version of the Red Data Book website was recently launched which allows visitors to the website to add and view new information. In this way, the database on Asia's threatened birds can be kept up-to-date, and OBC members are encouraged to add new records of threatened species, or information relevant to the conservation of their habitats and key sites.

Although *Threatened birds of Asia* is now widely available, we recognise that it is not an easy book to use. The sheer number and variety of threatened species is overwhelming – over 300 are covered in detail, ranging from small passerines confined to a single island or mountain range to widespread migratory waterbirds and raptors. The species accounts vary in length from two to 45 pages, with numerous long accounts for widespread birds that are under pressure in many parts of their ranges. *Threatened birds of Asia* includes thousands of individual recommendations for conservation actions, but these are spread through the detailed species accounts. It can take a lot of time to piece together all of the material relevant to a particular country or site, even for people with a good knowledge of the birds and geography of Asia. It is clear that many organisations and individuals do not have the time or expertise to access and use the recommendations in the book, including many of

those with the authority and influence to implement them on the ground.

To address this problem, the BirdLife Asia Partnership initiated a follow-up project to *Threatened birds of Asia*, to prepare a user-friendly strategy for the conservation of the region's birds. This has now been published, with the title *Saving Asia's threatened birds: a guide for government and civil society*. This 250-page book presents the main conclusions of *Threatened birds of Asia* to decision-makers and other readers in a clear and highly visual form. It includes many maps and about 200 colour photographs of Asia's threatened birds, their habitats and important conservation issues. It will be published on CD-ROM and a website, with links from its summary information to the more detailed species accounts from *Threatened birds of Asia*.

A key feature of *Saving Asia's threatened birds* is its direct focus on habitats, recognising that habitat loss is by far the most important cause of endangerment in birds, and that many threatened species share similar ranges, habitat requirements and conservation needs. Analysis of the distributions and habitat requirements of Asia's threatened birds has identified nine major forest regions (see Figure 1), three grassland regions and 20 wetland regions as priority areas for conservation, and there is also a group of threatened seabirds. Many of these habitat regions correspond closely to one or more of Conservation International's 25 global Biodiversity Hotspots (see, e.g. Mittermeier *et al.* 1999¹), BirdLife's 218 Endemic Bird Areas (see ICBP 1992,² Stattersfield *et al.* 1998³) and WWF's Global 200 Ecoregions (see, e.g., Wikramanayake *et al.* 2002⁴). The recommendations made for threatened birds, sites and habitats in the forest, grassland and wetland regions are relevant to all people working to protect the biodiversity of these priority areas.

Saving Asia's threatened birds includes accounts for all 33 habitat regions, each of which documents and maps the groups of threatened bird species that it supports, and the habitats and sites that are critical for their survival. Most crucially, these accounts focus on the major land-use issues affecting the habitats of threatened birds, as well as any direct threats to the birds themselves. Proposals are made on how to reduce or eliminate the negative impacts of activities

Table 1. Asia’s ‘lost species’: Critical and Endangered bird species not recorded in recent decades.

Species (Critical and Endangered only)	Last record	Areas to search
Crested Shelduck <i>Tadorna cristata</i>	1964	Wetlands in eastern Russia, North Korea and probably north-east China, including forested rivers in mountains
Pink-headed Duck <i>Rhodonessa caryophyllacea</i>	1949	Wetlands in northern India, especially in Bihar and Assam, and northern Myanmar
Himalayan Quail <i>Ophrysia superciliosa</i>	1876	Mountain grasslands and forests in the Western Himalayas in India, including following up several unconfirmed reports
Javanese Lapwing <i>Vanellus macropterus</i>	1940	Coastal grasslands and wetlands on Java, and possibly elsewhere in Indonesia
Silvery Wood-pigeon <i>Columba argentina</i>	1931	Small islands off Sumatra and other Greater Sunda islands, Malaysia and Indonesia, and the coasts of the larger islands, including following up several recent unconfirmed sightings
Sulu Bleeding-heart <i>Gallicolumba menagei</i>	1891	Forests on Tawitawi and other islands in the Sulu archipelago, Philippines
Negros Fruit-dove <i>Ptilinopus arcanus</i>	1953	Forest on Mt Canlaon, where the single known specimen was collected, and elsewhere on Negros and Panay, Philippines
Siau Scops-owl <i>Otus siaoensis</i>	1866	Forest on Siau, where the single known specimen was collected, and possibly on other small islands off northern Sulawesi, Indonesia
White-eyed River-martin <i>Eurychelidon sirintarae</i>	1978	Riverine habitats in Thailand and elsewhere in South-East Asia
Rueck’s Blue-flycatcher <i>Cyornis ruckii</i>	1918	Lowland forest in northern Sumatra, Indonesia, and possibly elsewhere in the Sundaland forests
Banggai Crow <i>Corvus unicolor</i>	1880s	Banggai and other islands in the Banggai and Sula island groups, Indonesia

In addition to the Critical and Endangered species in the table, four Vulnerable species (found in areas where their habitats are currently under relatively low pressure) have not been recorded in recent decades: Nicobar Sparrowhawk *Accipiter butleri* (last definite record in the Nicobar islands in 1901, but possible sightings in the 1990s); Manipur Bush-quail *Perdica manipurensis* (no confirmed records in the grasslands of north-east India and Bangladesh since 1932); Black-browed Babbler *Malacocincla perspicillata* (known by a single specimen probably collected in Kalimantan, Indonesia, in the 1840s); Rusty-throated Wren-babbler *Spelaeornis badeigularis* (known by a single specimen collected in the eastern Himalayas of India in 1947), plus two Data Deficient species (found in areas where their habitats might not be under any pressure): Vaurie’s Nightjar *Caprimulgus centralasicus* (known by a single specimen collected in the Taklimakan desert, Xinjiang, China in 1929), and Sillem’s Mountain-finch *Leucosticte sillemi* (known by two specimens collected at high altitude in the Western Himalayas in 1929).

causing habitat loss and degradation. Important gaps in coverage of threatened bird species by national protected areas networks are identified, with proposals on where new parks and reserves might be established. Unsustainable exploitation is identified as a major problem for certain threatened birds, and recommendations are made for its control. The conservation of many threatened Asian birds is hindered by incomplete data, and surveys or ecological studies are identified to address the most important gaps in knowledge.

The wide variety of conservation measures proposed include many that can only be taken by

government, such as the establishment of new protected areas, and the drafting and enforcement of laws to control hunting or the wild bird trade. Other proposals are directed at private industries, for example to encourage companies to manage forests and plantations in ways that minimise damage to bird habitats, or even to create or enhance areas of natural habitat. Conservationists have an important role in informing government and industries about important habitats and sites for threatened birds and other biodiversity, and when their actions (or inaction) are harming wildlife and habitats. Most Asian governments are parties to a range of international and regional

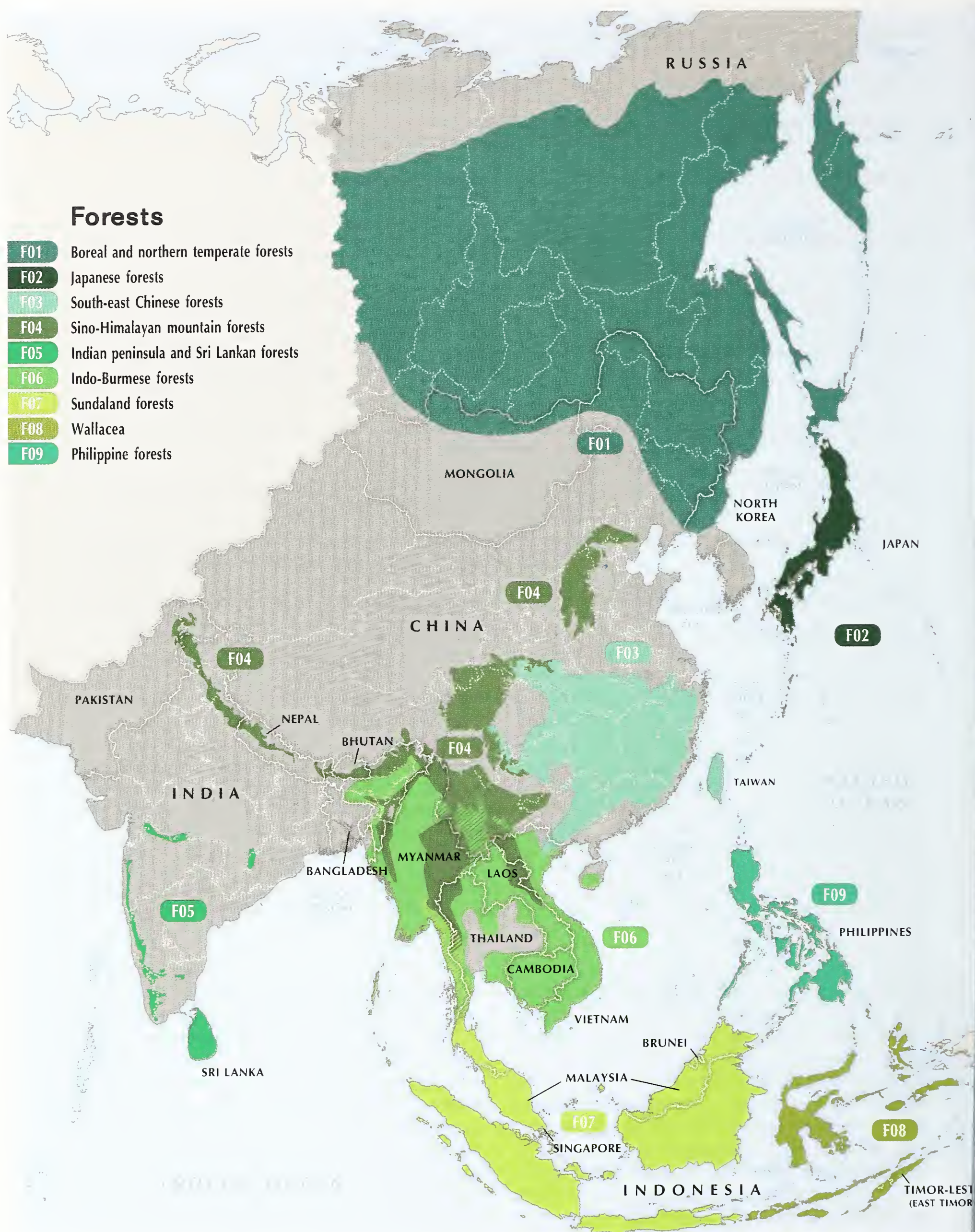


Figure 1. Map of key forest regions for threatened birds in Asia



Captions for 1-6 are on p. 51.

Table 2. Key gaps in knowledge of Critical and Endangered bird species in Asia.

Species (Critical and Endangered only)	Actions to address main gaps in knowledge
White-eared Night-heron <i>Gorsachius magnificus</i>	Surveys in south-east China and northern Vietnam to investigate the species's breeding distribution and status, and the key sites for its conservation
Japanese Night-heron <i>Gorsachius goisagi</i>	National survey in Japan to update information on the species's breeding distribution and status, and the key sites for its conservation
White-rumped Vulture <i>Gyps bengalensis</i>	Research on the factors currently affecting its population in South Asia, to determine the emergency action required for its protection
Indian Vulture <i>Gyps indicus</i>	Research on the factors currently affecting its population in South Asia, to determine the emergency action required for its protection
Slender-billed Vulture <i>Gyps tenuirostris</i>	Research on the factors currently affecting its population in South Asia, to determine the emergency action required for its protection
Sumba Buttonquail <i>Turnix everetti</i>	Surveys on Sumba in Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, to investigate the species's distribution and status, ecological requirements, and the key sites for its conservation
Moluccan Woodcock <i>Scolopax rochussenii</i>	Surveys in Northern Maluku, Indonesia, to investigate the species's distribution and status, ecological requirements, and the key sites for its conservation
Jerdon's Courser <i>Rhinoptilus bitorquatus</i>	Surveys in arid parts of eastern India, including thorough analysis of satellite images, to investigate the species's distribution and status, and the key sites for its conservation
Chinese Crested-tern <i>Sterna bernsteini</i>	Surveys on islands off the coast of eastern China and Vietnam, including at presumed former colonies in Shandong, to investigate the species's status and the key sites for its conservation
Blue-fronted Lorikeet <i>Charmosyna toxopei</i>	Surveys on Buru in Maluku, Indonesia, to investigate the species's distribution and status, ecological requirements, and the key sites for its conservation
Sumatran Ground-cuckoo <i>Carpococcyx viridis</i>	Surveys on Sumatra, Indonesia, to investigate the species's distribution and status, ecological requirements, and the key sites for its conservation
Taliabu Masked-owl <i>Tyto nigrobrunnea</i>	Surveys on the Sulu islands, Indonesia, to investigate the species's distribution and status, ecological requirements, and the key sites for its conservation
Flores Scops-owl <i>Otus alfredi</i>	Surveys on Flores and other islands in northern Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, to investigate the species's distribution and status, and the key sites for its conservation
Forest Owlet <i>Heteroglaux blewitti</i>	Surveys in the forests of central India, to investigate the species's distribution and status, and the key sites for its conservation
Gurney's Pitta <i>Pitta gurneyi</i>	Surveys of the forests of southern Myanmar, to investigate the species's distribution and status, and the key sites for its conservation
Isabela Oriole <i>Oriolus isabellae</i>	Surveys on Luzon, Philippines, to investigate the species's distribution and status, ecological requirements, and the key sites for its conservation

conventions and other mechanisms relevant to the conservation of threatened birds. The introduction to *Saving Asia's threatened birds* outlines actions which might be taken under these agreements for the benefit of threatened species

(e.g. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species), sites (e.g. Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy) and habitats

(e.g. United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification).

Environmental NGOs and individuals can undertake many of the actions proposed in the book. For example, the conservation of many threatened birds is hampered by incomplete knowledge of their distribution, abundance and habitat requirements, and surveys and ecological studies are therefore recommended in many parts of Asia. Seventeen Asian species have not been recorded in recent decades (Table 1), including a few that may already be extinct (e.g. Crested Shelduck), but most of them probably still survive and need to be searched for to identify key sites and the most appropriate conservation actions. There are major gaps in knowledge of the distributions and/or ecological requirements of another 16 Critical and Endangered species (Table 2), which make it difficult to devise appropriate measures for their conservation. Another way to help in the conservation of threatened birds is to work for the protection of the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) that are being selected for these species during BirdLife's on-going IBA programme.

In summary, the analysis in *Saving Asia's threatened birds* highlights the main issues affecting

Asia's birds and habitats, proposes many practical approaches that can be taken now to address them, and provides a framework for the development of new conservation actions in the future. The photographs on pages 49 illustrate examples of some of the key conservation issues that it covers. The book and CD-ROM will be distributed widely to decision-makers and the conservation community within Asia, and copies are for sale at cost price from the Natural History Book Service (<www.nhbs.com> or via <nhbs@nhbs.co.uk>).

Acknowledgements

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Captions to plates on p. 49

- 1 Numbers of three *Gyps* vulture species have recently crashed in South Asia, and intensive research is underway to find out why. Photo: A. Rahmani
- 2 Forest Owlet *Athene blewitti* was rediscovered in central India in 1997, after a gap of over 100 years, but all four known sites are unprotected and under pressure. Photo: F. Ishtiaq
- 3 The world's largest Milky Stork *Mycteria cinerea* colonies in coastal Sumatra are in mangrove forests that are threatened by logging, and the inter-tidal mudflats where they feed are being converted to shrimp- and fish-ponds. Photo: J. Hornbuckle
- 4 Disturbance and increased predation at its breeding colonies are a major threat to Japanese Murrelet *Synthliboramphus wumizusume*. Photo: K Ono
- 5 Logging and development increasingly threaten the boreal forests of north-east Asia, particularly the riverine habitat of Blakiston's Fish-owl *Ketupa blakistoni* (pictured) and Scaly-sided Merganser *Mergus squamatus*. Photo: Y. Makino
- 6 Floating logs illustrate the scale of clear-felling in south-central China before a recent logging ban. There is now an opportunity to protect and manage remaining forests under the National Forest Protection Program. Photo: M. J. Crosby

Photospot



Gurney's Pitta *Pitta gurneyi*, male (above) and female (below). These incredible photographs are a testament to the skill and patience of the photographer, Kanit Khanikul. They were taken near Trail M, Khao Nor Chuchi, Thailand, April 4 2003. Larger prints (200 mm X 300 mm) of these photos are available from the Club. See page 12 for more details.





- 1 Relict Gulls *Larus relictus*, Tsingtuozhi, Tianjin, China, 2003. Photo by He Fen-qi. (see article on p. 41).
- 2 Entrance to the nest of Giant Nuthatch *Sitta magna*. Note the absence of mud plastering. Photo by Guy Shorrock. (see article on p. 54).

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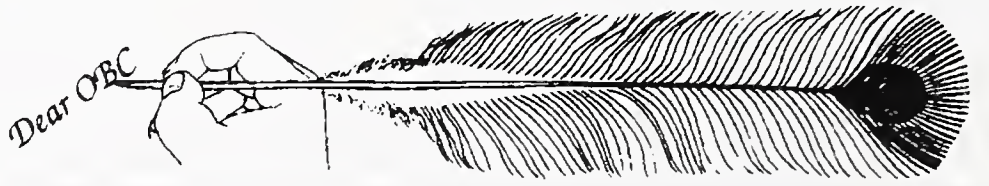
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To the Editor



Description of the nest site and eggs of Giant Nuthatch *Sitta magna*

On 24 February 2003 I was birdwatching on Doi Chang Dao, Thailand, just off the main road to the substation, a short distance beyond the permit checkpoint (see fig. 1). The altitude was 1,320 m (watch altimeter recently calibrated). Walking along a short ridge track I flushed a Giant Nuthatch *Sitta magna* apparently from about 1 m off the ground and around the back of a small tree, approximately 10 m in height, in the middle of the track. The bird moved to a tree just 6 m away and gave excellent views at eye-level before flying off. The behaviour of the bird made me wonder if it was breeding nearby. However, looking around I paid little attention to two oval holes in the small tree from which the bird had

flown, particularly as they were so low to the ground and not plastered with mud.

Later that day I checked *A field guide to the birds of South-East Asia*¹ and, having noted the nest site description, I realised a return visit was required. Interestingly the clutch was recorded as three and otherwise undescribed. On 25 February I returned to the location and as I approached the same tree I again saw a Giant Nuthatch flying away and disappearing into trees ahead of me. Examining the two adjacent oval holes in the tree I saw both had been 'chiselled'. Whether this had significantly altered the size or shape of the holes I was unable to say. One hole was positioned just above the other and both joined the same cavity inside the base of the tree. Looking into the lower hole, aided by a pencil torch, I was able to see a nest cup and six eggs at the bottom of the cavity, and about 10–15 cm below the lower entrance hole. The eggs were quite well rounded, creamy coloured and lightly speckled with brown spots. One egg was noticeably less speckled. The eggs were much less well marked and less tapered in shape than those of Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*. The nest cup would have been about 1.2 m from the ground and the diameter of the tree at this point was around 25 cm. I later located a reference² to two Giant Nuthatch nests found in Myanmar and Thailand. These nests were found in early April and both contained three young. The nests holes were not plastered and noted as between two and three metres above the floor. I could hear a bird calling close by so I photographed the tree and the entrance holes and left the site (see photo on p. 53).

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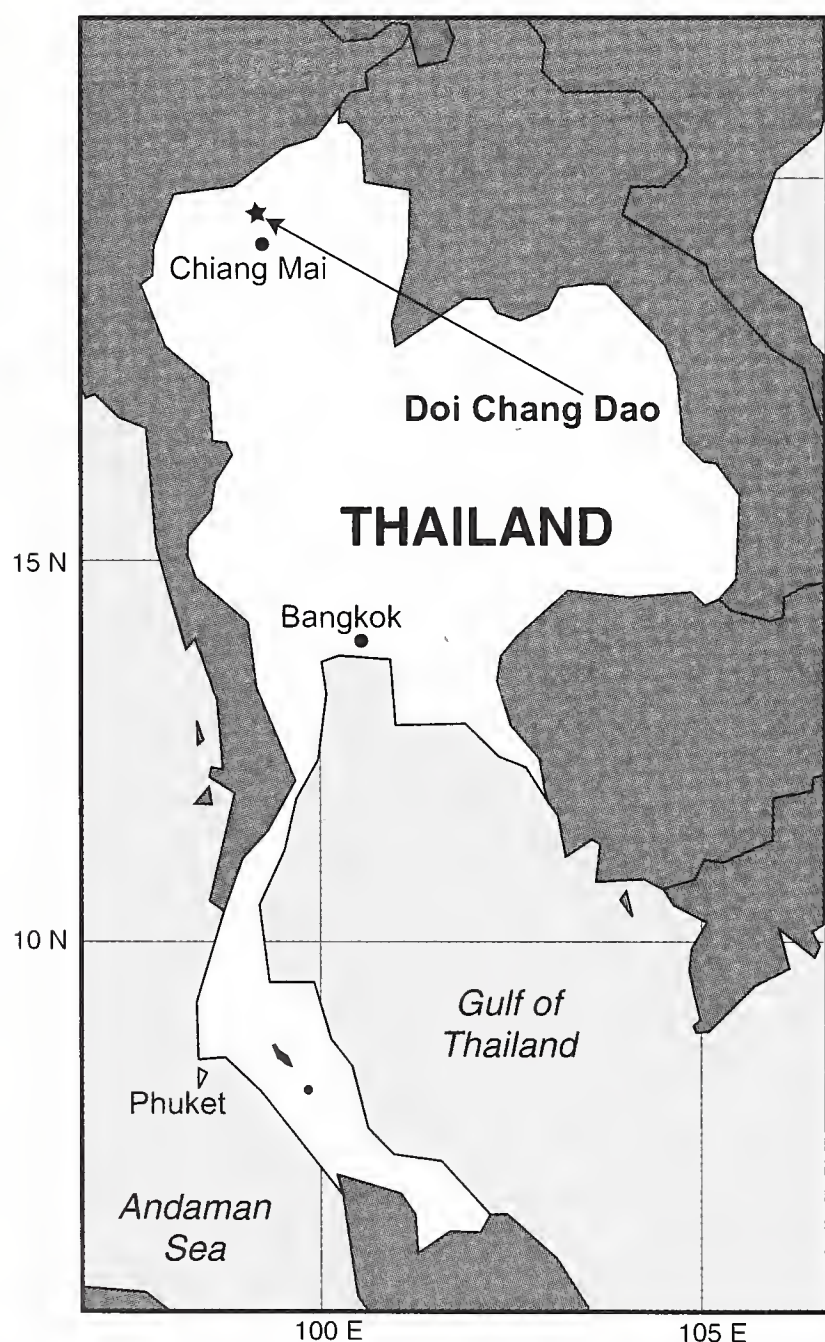


Figure 1. Map: Location of Doi Chang Dao, Thailand

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Observations of Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* at Morigaon, Central Assam, India

The Amur Falcon is a widespread but uncommon migrant through the Indian Subcontinent with more records during the autumn than in the spring passage period. The species travels a distance of around 12,000 kms from its breeding grounds in the far east of Russia, China, Mongolia and Korea, to its wintering grounds in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia and other parts of southern Africa.

During the last week of October and the first two weeks of November 2001, a team of birdwatchers from the Green Guard Nature Organisation (GGNO) observed large numbers of Amur Falcons at Morigaon (92°14.5' to 92°18' E and 22°16.5 to 26°17.5'N), Central Assam, which falls on the species's migratory path through the Indian Subcontinent. The previous largest counts from Assam include 1,240+ birds at Laluk, Lakimpur on 8 November 1994, and 1,000+ birds at Dharamtul, Morigaon on 26 October 1994.¹ The observations made by GGNO represent perhaps the largest flock of the species ever reported outside its breeding and wintering areas (Shimanta Goswami, pers.comm), and were as follows;

- On 27 October, 1,000 birds were observed hovering over paddyfields at Lothabori, near Morigaon at about 06h45.
- On 30 October, a flock of about 5,000 birds roosted on high-power electric wires in Morigaon (see fig.1).
- On 1 November, members of GGNO organised a trip to study the birds. The team counted 17,893 birds in an area of 4 km². Amazingly, 10,020 birds were perched in a straight line extending up to 2.5 kms in an area between Naokata and Lothabori.

The falcons were distributed in an area of about 450 km² with the highest concentration of birds 1 km north of Morigaon. Several surrounding villages also supported large flocks.

Over the following days the team made a number of behavioural observations of the flock. In particular, the birds were intolerant of other species of birds in the area and were particularly aggressive towards Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*, various vultures, Greater Adjutant *Leptoptilos dubius* and Lesser Adjutant *L. javanicus*, and Black Kite *Milvus migrans*. It was also noted that the arrival of the falcons resulted in common resident species such as Asian Pied Starling *Sturnus*

contra and Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* and others leaving the area, only to reappear after the falcons had left for roosting sites.

Each day the falcons began arriving at the foraging sites in small flocks at about 06h30 from a southerly direction. The falcons spent most of their time roosting on power lines although, occasionally, small flocks would hover over paddyfields for periods of up to one hour. The return journey began at around 14h30 and continued until 16h00. By tracking the flocks' return flights, the team discovered two separate roosting sites. The first was in a plain forest area in the southernmost part of Morigaon district although only small numbers roosted here at distance of about 18 kms from the daytime foraging area. The majority of birds moved further south, towards the hills of Om-sowai, some 65 kms from the feeding grounds.

The GGNO team consisted of its Director Shimanta Kumar Goswami, Assistant Director Kamal Bhuyan, Ranjan Borthakur, Sasidananda Bordoloi, Kandarpa Bordoloi, Manas Bhuyan and Ujjal Borthakur, Ranjit Bora, Amit Devnath and Moon Das. Wildlife photographer Diganta Goswami also accompanied the team.

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2



3



1 Part of a large flock of Amur Falcons *Falco amurensis* roosting on powerlines, Morigaon, Central Assam, India, October 2002.

2 Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*, male. Photo by Warwick Tarboton.

3 Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*, female. Photo by Warwick Tarboton.

Waterbirds spending the boreal summer at Dalai Nur National Nature Reserve, Inner Mongolia, China

Surveys of waterbirds and their habitats at Dalai Nur National Nature Reserve, Inner Mongolia, China were conducted in July 2000. Four areas around the lake, representing key habitats for waterbirds and different degrees of habitat quality and disturbance, were selected for survey. A total of 13,024 birds of 56 species was recorded in the surveys. The survey results show that: (1) Wu-Lan-Nur, consisting of an oxbow lake and riverine marshes, is one of best places for waterbirds and shorebirds and should be designated as a Ramsar Site; (2) species richness and density within the four sections are strongly correlated with the proportion of shallow water and grassland present; (3) Dalai Nur is facing threats from trapping of birds with fishnets, collection of bird eggs and reed cutting. Oil field development in the reserve core area may lead to degradation of waterbird habitats.

Introduction

Dalai Nur, meaning 'Sea Lake', is located in north-east Inner Mongolia (117°00'10"–117°41'40" E, 48°30'40" – 49°20'40" N). The lake is 32 km long with an average width of 32 km, and has a total area about 1,000 km². It is the fifth largest fresh water lake in China (see fig.1). More than 80 small lakes or ponds surround Dalai Nur, all filling from Dalai Nur during flood periods. Three rivers flow from Mongolia to Dalai Nur: the Wu-er-xun, Ke-lu-lun and Ge-Er-Gu-Ne Rivers. These rivers have developed oxbow lakes and riverine marshes which are very important sites for shorebirds and other waterbirds.¹ Dalai Nur National Nature Reserve was established in 1986. A total area of 2,329 km², covering Dalai Nur and the surrounding region, was designated as a Protected Area Reserve. Reserve management focuses on four core areas.² Due to its geographical location and widespread and diverse wetlands, Dalai Nur is believed to be one of most important staging and breeding areas for waterbirds in the East Asian - Australasian Flyway. However, very little ornithological research work has been conducted in the region. From 14–22 July, 2000, a team consisting of reserve staff, Mongolian conservationists, and personnel from Wetlands International undertook a survey of Dalai Nur, with the aims of identifying: (1) the ecological values of this area, particularly for Ramsar designation purposes, (2) threats, and (3) potential means of relieving existing and potential threats.

Study sites

Wu-Lan-Nur Core Area (Section 1): Located in the southern part of the reserve, and consisting of an oxbow lake and riverine marshes (20 km long by 1.5 km wide), supplied by the Wu-er-xun

River, and forming an area of shallow water (<1.5 m deep). Extensive reed beds and swamps containing *Typha orientalis* and *Carex lepidium* cover the area. It is one of best sites in the reserve

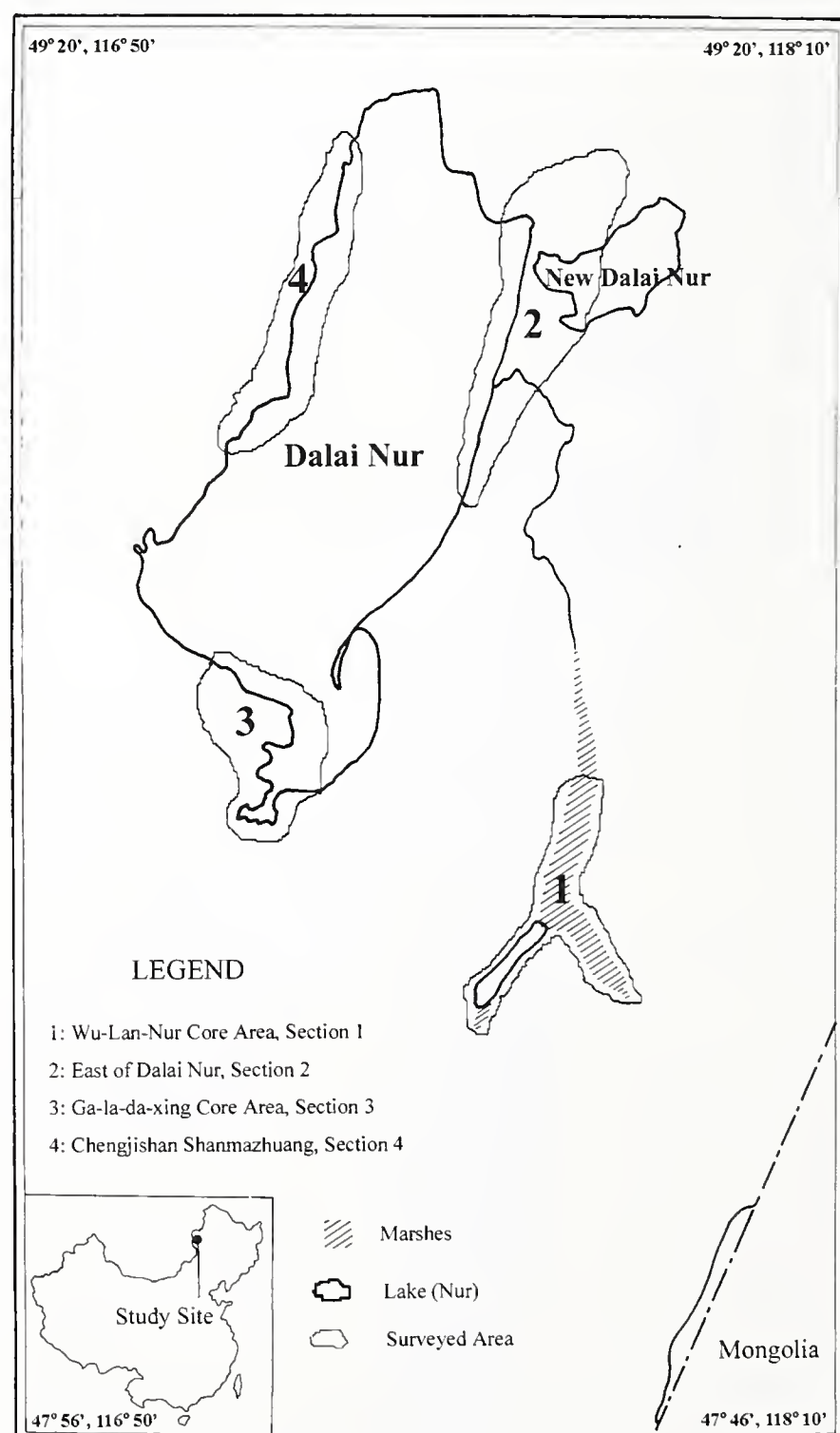


Figure 1: Map of study site

for breeding and roosting waterbirds. The reserve management has set up a work station in the area with three staff. The total area is 9,436 ha.

East Dalai Nur (Section 2): Supports the best grassland within the reserve and the management objective is to preserve this area as a typical grassland ecosystem. It is important for breeding Great Bustard *Otis tarda* and Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo*. The total area is about 19,000 ha.

Ga-la-da-xing Core Area (Section 3): Located south-west of Dalai Nur and consisting of small lakes and marshes. It is reported that this is one of best stopover areas for shorebirds and waterbirds during northward and southward migration. Some endangered species have been recorded in this area as well: Great Bustard (breeding), White-naped Crane *Grus vipio* (breeding), Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus* (passage) and Demoiselle Crane (breeding). The total area is 21,457 ha.

Chengjishan Shanmazhuang (Section 4): Located to the west of Dalai Nur and consisting of small lakes and marshes adjacent to the larger lake. There are some fishing villages nearby. The total area is estimated to be 10,000 ha.

Methods

The survey team consisting of 14 people covered about 840 km around Dalai Nur, spending one or two days in each section. During the survey waterbirds were counted using binoculars and telescopes. Since the survey areas were so large, it was not possible to survey the same place twice. However, counts were verified by comparing the results from four teams working simultaneously. Counts were incomplete due to the distance of some birds from the survey teams and the size of the areas being surveyed. The sizes of the areas surveyed were estimated using a GPS and the estimated proportions surveyed of the four sections are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Estimated proportion of area surveyed in each Section.

	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4
Surveyed area	c.2,000 ha	c.2,000 ha	c.2,000 ha	c.2,000 ha
Total area	9,436 ha	19,000 ha	10,000 ha	21,457 ha
Proportion	21%	10%	20%	9%

Local people and communities were interviewed to obtain information about their economic activities, attitudes towards conservation and their development plans for the next two years. The habitat quality of all surveyed sites was ranked on a basis of (1) proportion of shallow water area which was less than 1.5 m deep and (2) grassland area, in order to determine if there was a relationship between waterbird numbers and habitat quality.³

Results

Bird counts

In total, 56 species of waterbirds, including birds of prey, were recorded at Dalai Nur. The total number of individual birds counted was 13,024. The results are listed in Table 2.

Most of the waterbirds and shorebirds were found in the marshes and small lakes around Dalai Nur. Relatively few birds were found on Dalai Nur itself, mainly because this lake is comparatively deep (over 4 m, on average) and few waterplants were present.⁴Newborn juveniles of the following species were found: Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*, Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides*, Demoiselle Crane and Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*.

One Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* was found with an orange leg-flag on its right leg.

Relationship between waterbirds and habitats

The density and richness of waterbirds were strongly correlated to habitats in terms of the proportion of shallow water areas and grassland present.

Since Section 1 consisted of an oxbow lake and riverine marshes, the area surveyed was mainly covered with shallow water less than 1.5 m deep. Sections 2 and 4 are located in east and west Dalai Nur, where there are numerous small lakes and ponds adjacent to the large lake. Section 3, located in south-west Dalai Nur, mainly consists of grassland and is partly used for animal husbandry.

Threats in Dalai Nur National Nature Reserve

Wu-Lan-Nur Core Area (Section 1)

- (a) Fishermen resettling in the core area: More than 10 fishermen have settled in the core area and some new buildings are being erected, indicating that more people will settle there in the future. The reserve management department is concerned that more people are now fishing in the reed marshes and are disturbing breeding waterbirds and collecting

Table 2: Bird numbers by Section.

English Name	Scientific Name	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	11			
Swan Goose	<i>Anser cygnoides</i>	1446		83	2
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	26		1	
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadoma tadoma</i>	201	2	9	
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadoma ferruginea</i>	377		58	41
European Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	98		5	62
Falcated Duck	<i>Anas falcata</i>	14		1	
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	199		213	150
Common Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	3			4
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	17	5	3	31
Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>	65		419	28
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	2		1	
Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>				21
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	4		18	18
Great Bustard	<i>Otis tarda</i>	1			
Demoiselle Crane	<i>Grus virgo</i>	81		16	
White-naped Crane	<i>Grus vipio</i>	1			
Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	24			31
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>			4	
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	1	1	3	12
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	1051	646	59	210
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	14	1	5	2
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	36		11	7
Lesser Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	4		40	6
Oriental Plover	<i>Charadrius veredus</i>			3	
Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	30			
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	386	2	14	
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>			24	
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	46	1	1	
Eastern Curlew	<i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	52			
Little Curlew	<i>Numenius minutus</i>	106	28	65	3
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	17		16	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		2		
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	18	2	8	4
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	5	1	1	21
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	6	6	3	
Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	11	7	29	41
Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>	3	1	6	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	9	1	1	1
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>			1	
Pintail Snipe	<i>Gallinago stenura</i>	2		2	
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>			2	
Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>			5	
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	1			
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	<i>Calidris acuminata</i>	5	2	17	
Red-necked Stint	<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>	63		151	
Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>	4	1	11	
Mew Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	421	8	30	85
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	553	3	19	192
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>		1	2003	860
Relict Gull	<i>Larus relictus</i>		1		2
Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>	10	70	60	320
White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>			10	82
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>			1	

Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	9	4	8	21
Little Tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>		2		
Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i>				62
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>		4	1	
Eastern Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus spilonotus</i>	14	2	2	8
Upland Buzzard	<i>Buteo hemilasius</i>	3	2	10	2
Rough-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>				1
Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	1			
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>				158
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>			10	
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	353		9	
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	264	6	1	4
Great Egret	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>	1		1	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	88	20	3	17
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	6			
Great Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	1			
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platelea leucorodia</i>	42			
Total number		6206	832	3477	2509
Total Species		53	29	52	34

Table 3. Richness and density of waterbirds recorded in the four sections of Dalai Nur National Nature Reserve

	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	Section 4
Habitat quality rank ^a	1	3	2	4
Species per ha	0.027	0.015	0.026	0.017
Individual per ha	3.10	0.42	1.74	1.26

^a 1 is best and 4 is poorest. Ranking based on the proportion of shallow water areas and grassland present in the Section.

- eggs. The reserve plans to take legal action to curb this problem.
- (b) Reed cutting: Reeds are harvested in autumn for paper production. Waterbirds usually breed in the reed marsh from May and June onwards. Since reeds are unable to grow high enough before May, the reserve management requires the reed harvesting company to cut the reeds in strips, leaving some tall strips for breeding birds.
- (c) The continuity of water supply to the lake is uncertain.
- (d) A large oil field has been found in the reserve and some wells have been drilled in the core area. This potential threat may become serious.

East Dalai Nur (Section 2)

Interviews with local people indicated that bird hunting and egg collection often occurred in this area. However, it was not possible to measure the hunting pressure.

Ga-la-da-xing Core Area (Section 3)

Five fish nets were found around the coast of Dalai Nur, measuring 450–500 m in length. The reserve staff stated that they had recently collected over one hundred waterbirds trapped in the nets; all birds, mainly gulls and ducks, had been drowned.

Chengjishan Shanmazhuang (Section 4)

No specific threats were identified. However, potential threats include setting fishing nets in the shallow water to trap waterbirds, egg collection, water pollution from coal-mining and over-grazing by domestic livestock.

Discussion and recommendations

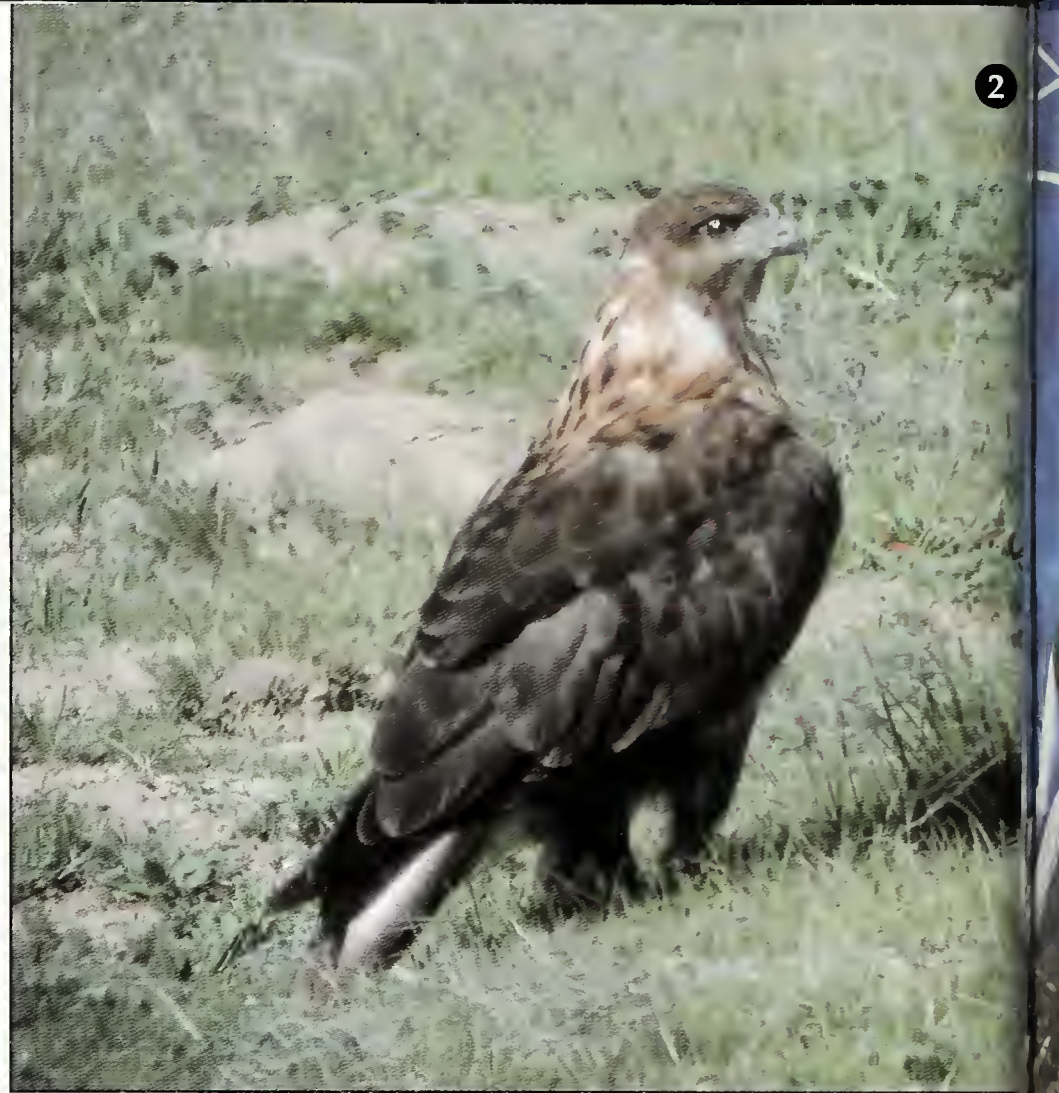
According to the survey results, the Dalai Nur National Nature Reserve, especially the Wu-lan-Nur Core Area (Section 1), is an internationally important wetland for the reasons listed in Table 4.

It was found that Wu-Lan-Nur (Section 1) is the most important site for waterbirds and shorebirds of the four surveyed. This Section

1



2



3



4



5



6





7



8

Table 4. International ornithological importance of Dalai Nur National Nature Reserve

Birds	Importance	Ramsar Criteria*
Total number of waterbirds	> 20,000 (breeding and staging).	3a
Mute Swan	11; breeding; nationally protected.	3b
Swan Goose	1,531; breeding site; >1% of global population; Endangered.	3c
Great Bustard	Nationally protected.	3b
Demoiselle Crane	97; Nationally protected.	3b
White-naped Crane	1; Vulnerable, ⁵ nationally protected.	3b
Northern Lapwing	1,966; breeding site; >1% of flyway population.	3b
Little Curlew	202.	3b
Eastern Curlew	52; Near-threatened. ⁵	3b
Relict Gull	3; Vulnerable. ⁵	3b
Caspian Tern	62; Nationally protected.	3b
Hen Harrier	26; Nationally protected.	3b
Eastern Marsh Harrier	17; Nationally protected.	3b
Upland Buzzard	Nationally protected.	3b
Rough-legged Buzzard	Nationally protected.	3b
Tawny Eagle	Nationally protected.	3b
Great Crested Grebe	Breeding population of 362 ; nationally protected.	3b
Eurasian Spoonbill	42; breeding site; nationally protected.	3b

* Ramsar Criteria: 3a. Supporting 20,000 waterfowl,. 3b. Supporting substantial numbers of individuals from particular groups of waterfowl (e.g. endangered species)⁵ 3c. Support 1% world population.⁶

satisfies the most Ramsar Criteria (see Table 4). The proportion of shallow water area (<1.5 m deep) and grassland is the most important environmental factor affecting the density and richness of waterbirds at Dalai Nur. During the survey, we did not find direct evidence of bird hunting and human disturbance to birds.⁷ The low human population density of <12 persons/km² in this area⁸ probably means that there is not a strong negative human impact on the pattern of bird distribution. However, indirect evidence obtained from interviews with local people and from the survey indicates that the following three threats occur: (1) setting of fish nets in shallow water to trap waterbirds, (2) egg collecting by local people, and (3) reed cutting, which can degrade breeding habitat. Moreover, a new oil field development at Wu-Lan-Nur may have a serious impact on habitat quality.⁹

The survey confirmed that Dalai Nur National Nature Reserve is an important wetland for waterbirds and shorebirds and the following recommendations were made to the reserve management department following the survey:

- (1) Wu-Lan-Nur qualifies as a wetland of international importance and should be designated as a Ramsar Site as soon as possible in order to protect it from potential threats.
- (2) An effective management plan should be developed for control of water tables and reed harvesting in the oxbow lake and riverine marshes of the core areas.
- (3) The issue of settlement of fishermen in the reserve core areas needs to be dealt with.
- (4) Effective environmental education should be provided for the local people.
- (5) The reserve management department needs to take control of the land in the core areas by obtaining land ownership from the government. As this land is not owned or controlled by the reserve, it has difficulty in stopping any development activities or potential threats, e.g. development of the oil field.

Subsequent to our survey, Wu-Lan Nur was designated in 2002 as a Ramsar Site of China, and the reserve management department drafted a management plan.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Wetlands International – Oceania and Wetlands International – China for organising the survey and Environment Australia, through the Asia Pacific Migratory Waterbird Strategy, for funding this project. We are very grateful to Mark Barter and Dr. Lew Young for providing valuable comments on the paper. The Dalai Nur National Nature Reserve Management Department provided much assistance to the survey team and Mr. Liu Songtao, Li Ming and other Reserve staff helped greatly with survey activities.

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Captions to plates on p. 62 and p. 63

- 1 Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*. Photo by Tim Loseby.
- 2 Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*. Photo by Simon Colenutt.
- 3 Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo*. Photo by Tim Loseby.
- 4 Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*. Photo by Ray Tipper.
- 5 Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*. Photo by Ray Tipper.
- 6 A pair of Daurian Partidge *Perdix dauurica*, Dalai Nur, China, June 1997. Photo by Simon Dowell.
- 7 Relict Gulls *Larus relictus* on nesting island, Dalai Nur, China, June 1997. Photo by Simon Dowell.
- 8 Relict Gulls *Larus relictus* and Brown-headed Gulls *L. brunnicephalus* at water's edge, Dalai Nur, China, June 1997. Photo by Simon Dowell.

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Recently Published

The 'Howard & Moore' Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World (3rd edition) edited by Edward C. Dickinson. Christopher Helm. £60

Although this is billed as the third edition of this world checklist there have been so many changes and additions that it is essentially a new work. The incorporation of the tremendous amount of new material has been facilitated by the involvement of five regional consultants who reassessed all of the taxonomic data. This edition has 1,039 large-format pages, which makes it considerably more bulky than the last (1991) edition. The total number of species recognised is 9,721 (including 128 extinct).

The introduction includes a brief discussion of the relative attributes of the Biological Species Concept (BSC) and the Phylogenetic Species Concept (PSC), and concludes by deciding to adhere to the BSC in this work. The sequence of families (no higher taxa groupings are used) is based on a system developed and discussed by Joel Cracraft and colleagues, which attempts to reflect currently accepted hypotheses of relationships. The resulting sequence is inevitably different from those adopted by other world and regional lists, which will annoy those who wish to maintain a so-called traditional sequence. However, many different sequences have been adopted in taxonomic works and handbooks and I, for one, applaud the constant striving to determine the true relationships of bird groups. Generic placements largely follow the 15-volume Peters *Checklist of birds of the world* (1931–1986), although some changes have been made without explanation, e.g. the bush robin genus *Tarsiger* is subsumed in *Luscinia*.

Species (and subspecies) recognition is also based on the Peters *Checklist* and it claims that, except for newly described taxa, the list only deviates from it where there has been an acceptable publication in an appropriate refereed journal or the taxon is recognised by an appropriate authority. It is admitted that the results of this process might seem arbitrary to the user and it is certainly difficult to appreciate why some splits are accepted but others with apparently good credentials are not. A comparison with OBC's *Annotated checklist of the*

birds of the Oriental region (Inskipp, Lindsey & Duckworth 1996) shows that there are 48 'lumps' (taxa regarded as species in OBC's list but as subspecies, synonyms or hybrids by the H&M list) and 70 'splits'. Of the lumps all except four (Volcano Swiftlet *Collocalia brevirostris* [Aerodramus] *vulcanorum*, White-bellied Whistler *Pachycephala monacha leucogastra*, Brown-streaked Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica williamsoni* and Bornean Spiderhunter *Arachnothera affinis everetti*), have referenced explanations or have followed Peters's taxonomy. However, there are 12 splits for which no information or references are given: Talaud Kingfisher *Todiramphus enigma*, Cave Swiftlet *Collocalia linchi*, Philippine Cuckoo Dove *Macropygia tenuirostris*, Ruddy Cuckoo Dove *M. emiliana*, Dusky Cuckoo Dove *M. magna*, Barred Dove *Geopelia maugei*, Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus*, Gansu Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus kansuensis*, Hume's Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia althaea*, Jerdon's Bushlark *Mirafra affinis*, Burmese Bushlark *M. microptera* and Indochinese Bushlark *M. erythrocephala*. Relevant references for all of these, except the swiftlet and the doves, are in Collar (2003, this issue), although some of these, e.g. Robson (2000) provide no explanations for their treatments.

The American Green-winged Teal *Anas carolinensis* is treated as conspecific with the Eurasian Teal *A. crecca* following the AOU (1998), whose arguments are, in my view, brief and inconclusive compared with those of Sangster *et al.* (2001, *Brit. Birds* 94: 218–226), who demonstrated molecular, morphological and behavioural differences.

It is very up to date as far as newly described species are concerned, despite the general cut-off date of 31 December 2000. A quick check revealed that virtually all recently described species are included except four (non-Asian) species described in 2002.

As far as common names are concerned it is noted in the Introduction that 'English names used in this edition have not been a main focus of revision', and this is clearly evident from the hotchpotch of adopted names, e.g. all *Megapodius* spp. are 'megapodes' except for *M. reinwardt*, which is a 'scrubfowl'; Ceylon Junglefowl, Sri Lankan Grey Hornbill and Sri Lanka Blue Magpie

show an obvious lack of standardisation, as do Pomarine Skua and Parasitic Jaeger, and Grey Junglefowl and Gray Treepie. Some names seem to be unnecessary innovations, e.g. why change the name of *Luscinia pectardens* from Firethroat to Fire-throated Robin, especially when *Luscinia* still contains Bluethroat, rubythroats and nightingales? It is unfortunate that in splitting off *Oenanthe chrysopygia* from *O. xanthopyrmyna* the latter is named Red-rumped Wheatear, a name usually applied to *O. moesta*, which is renamed Buff-rumped Wheatear. And why add 'Blue' to the name of Pale-chinned Flycatcher *Cyornis poliogenys*, a species which totally lacks blue? *Apalopteron familiare* has been moved from the honeyeater family to the white-eye family but inexplicably retains the name Bonin Honeyeater.

Distribution information is generally comprehensive and accurate although, anachronistically, the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh is not recognised and all of this part of India is referred to as 'Assam'. In addition, the decision to use the relatively recent and externally imposed name of Burma, instead of the traditional, long-established name Myanmar, is odd. The subspecies *stevensi* of Blunt-winged Warbler *Acrocephalus concinens*, which breeds only in the Assam plains, is given as breeding (presumably) in 'SE Nepal, Bangladesh, Assam, Burma', although there are no records for the first country.

Typos are admirably few but I did notice 'White-billed Treepie' instead of White-bellied.

The checklist finishes with an impressive list of 2,739 numbered references, which are all linked to the relevant place(s) in the text. This is a useful resource in its own right, although the use of 'et al.' for cases where there are more than two authors detracts somewhat from this. The index is very comprehensive and, despite its length, has been kept at a readable point size.

So how does this book compare with other comparable world checklists? Clements (2000, *Birds of the world – a checklist*. Fifth edition) is similar in format and includes 9,834 species (including 85 extinct). It also lists all subspecies but the taxa have no authors or dates and it is effectively unreferenced. A sample check of subspecies in both works indicated that Clements' list is incomplete and relatively uncritical as far as the validity of subspecies is concerned. At least four species newly described between 1996 and 1999 are missing (even from the regular web updates – a useful feature that is lacking from the Howard & Moore list). However, some of the distribution data, especially for the New World

species, are more complete than in the work under review and it is considerably cheaper at £35. A different type of product is *Birds of the world*, a database on CD-ROM (www.birdsoftheworld.org), which includes 9,970 species and 16,500 subspecies with authors and dates. It goes further than the work under review in giving distribution by country and a variety of other features, including numerous photographs and maps. However, again the subspecies included are not as complete as in the Howard & Moore list and the validity of some of those included is open to question. It is considerably more expensive at c. £100. A further world list that does not include subspecies is Sibley & Monroe (1990, *Distribution and taxonomy of birds of the world*, and 1993 Supplement). This enormous tome is now becoming dated but is still indispensable because of its comprehensive distribution data.

The Howard & Moore list appears to be the most accurate and reliable world list of birds currently available and I would thoroughly recommend it to anybody who wants a relatively compact list of birds of the world.

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Observation of White-cheeked Tits *Aegithalos leucogenys* in Himachal Pradesh, India and a review of the species's status in the Indian Himalayas

On 20 October 2002, late afternoon, I was walking back from Chail Wildlife Sanctuary to Chail village (2,150 m), south of Simla, Himachal Pradesh, India (see fig. 1). It is a very quiet, winding minor road with scrubby broadleaved forest on the slopes both above and below the road. On the downside of the road the canopy was up to 5 m above me and the nearest branches were almost overhanging the road. It was warm and sunny, but a fresh breeze was causing much foliage movement. A large flock of tits appeared alongside me and observations revealed that most (at least 40) were Black-throated Tits *Aegithalos concinnus*, but amongst them I also got on to several each of Black-lored Tit *Parus xanthogenys*, Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus* and Yellow-browed Tit *Sylviparus modestus*. Then I suddenly picked out an *Aegithalos* tit with a warm, earthy-brown crown, a fairly narrow black mask through the eye (which was whitish) extending down to the nape, clear white cheeks below the mask, a

black triangular bib extending right up to the base of the lower mandible, and off-whitish remainder of underparts. I identified it, and another which I glimpsed nearby, almost immediately as adult White-cheeked Tits. The tit flock was moving quite quickly through the trees alongside the road, and when I shortly had to walk around a hairpin bend the flock became too distant and I lost contact with it. My observation time of the initial White-cheeked Tit was probably little more than half a minute, unfortunately, but, although I had no expectation of finding this species in Himachal Pradesh, I am 100% certain of my identification.

The main range for the species is the mountain ranges of western and northern Pakistan, where the species inhabits the area from Chitral south to the Shinghar range and Zariat in northern Baluchistan, east to Gilgit and Baltistan in the north, and to Hazara and the Margalla hills near Islamabad in the south.¹ It is also found in the Safed Koh mountains of north-west Afghanistan.



Figure 1: Map showing some of the locations mentioned in the text.

However, its status in India is distinctly vague. Ward² states 'resident in Kashmir and is found in Gilgit and Baltistan': it is unclear what boundaries he was applying to the term Kashmir and it is likely that this included areas now administered by Pakistan. Baker³ simply states 'Garhwal, Simla Hills, into Kashmir and thence into Afghanistan'. Baker had access to much correspondence, most of which was never published and is not now available. Meinertzhagen⁴ states 'a single specimen obtained at Kangan in the Sind Valley (5,900 feet) on 31 March, 1926. Not seen elsewhere'. Of course, this record is now open to doubt because of Meinertzhagen's skin-stealing propensities. Halberg & Petersen's⁵ unpublished list of observations include a record of c.17 White-cheeked Tits seen at Deodi, Garhwal, Uttaranchal, on 11–12 October 1982. Harrap and Quinn¹ state: 'Also recorded in Garhwal...', citing Vaurie 1959.⁶ Ali & Ripley⁷ refer only to the Sind Valley for India, ignoring Baker's information, which they do more or less consistently for all species when no other subsequent information is available.

Thus, it seems that Halberg & Petersen's 1982 record at Deodi in Garhwal and my observation at Chail in Himachal Pradesh are the only known Indian records of the species since at least the 1920s. This begs several questions. Is White-cheeked Tit an extremely rare resident in the Indian Himalayas? Do a very few occasionally wander a huge distance eastwards from their Pakistan range? Why are the central and western Indian Himalayas largely overlooked as a birding destination? And are there other records lying unpublished and forgotten in birders' notebooks, especially for the period when the Indian-administered part of Kashmir and Jammu was a safe and popular destination?

Acknowledgements

I am hugely indebted to Carol and Tim Inskipp for checking references and for supplying all the available historical details regarding the species's status in India.

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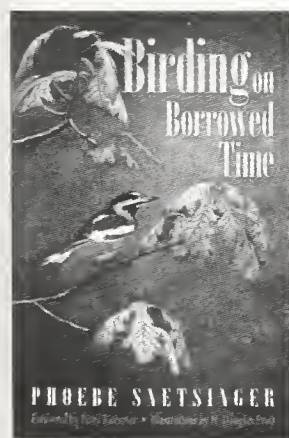
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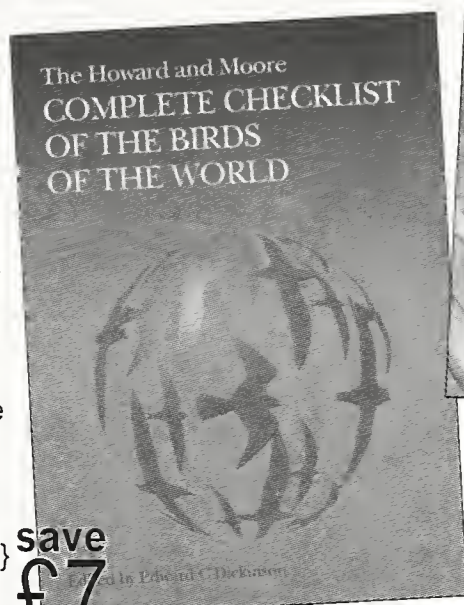


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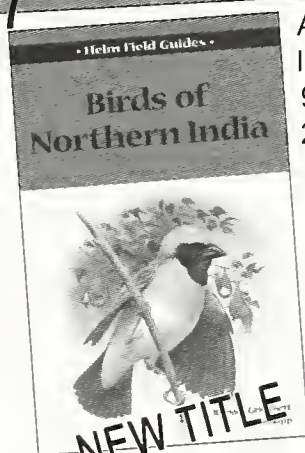
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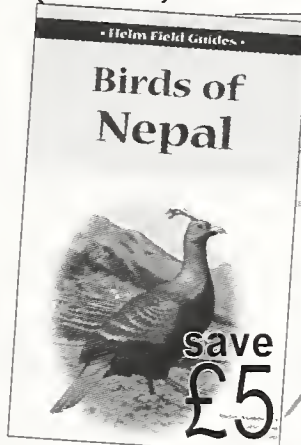
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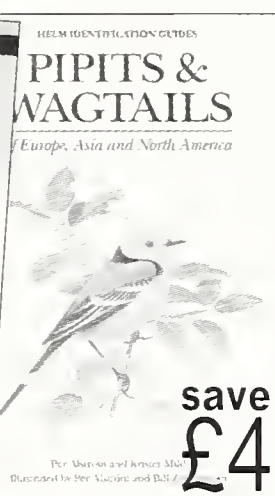
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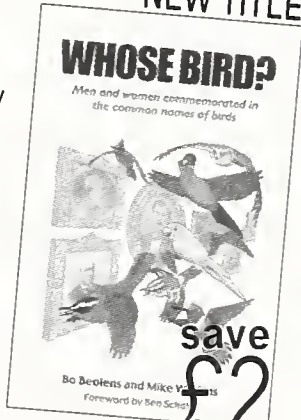
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From the Field

Compiled by Craig Robson

These are largely unconfirmed records covering the period from July 2002–September 2003. We urge that if they have not already done so, contributors provide full details to the relevant regional organisations in due course.

INDIA

A **Lesser White-fronted Goose** *Anser erythropus* was found at Pong Dam Wetland, Kangra District, Himachal Pradesh on 17th April (JdB), and there have also been recent records of **Marbled Duck** *Marmaronetta angustirostris*, with two at Harike, Punjab in February (BG,MPR,WH,SC) and a single bird at Asan Barrage, Uttaranchal Pradesh on 20th April (MPR,BG,A,SS). The sighting of a male **Eurasian Blackbird** *Turdus merula nigropileus* near Sambhar-dhasan village, eastern fringe of Achanakmar Wildlife Sanctuary, Maikal Range, Satpura Hills, Bilaspur District, Chhattisgarh during 13th–15th April (AB) appears to represent an eastward range extension of over 450 km for this race (from Seoni).

INDONESIA

Riau Archipelago

Pulau Pangkil Kecil, a small (6 ha) islet off Pulau Bintan, was paid its first ornithological visit on 19th–20th August 2002 (SR), and the following species were recorded: **Collared Kingfisher** *Todiramphus chloris*, **Black-nest Swiftlet** *Collocalia maxima*, **Black-naped Tern** *Sterna sumatrana*, **Brahminy Kite** *Haliastur indus*, **Changeable Hawk Eagle** *Spizaetus cirrhatus* (two resident birds), **Little Heron** *Butorides striatus*, **Mangrove Whistler** *Pachycephala grisola*, **Large-billed Crow** *Corvus macrorhynchos*, **Black-naped Oriole** *Oriolus chinensis*, **Oriental Magpie Robin** *Copsychus saularis*, **Olive-winged Bulbul** *Pycnonotus plumosus*, **Rufous-tailed Tailorbird** *Orthotomus sericeus*, **Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker** *Dicaeum cruentatum*, **Brown-throated Sunbird** *Anthreptes malacensis*, and **Olive-backed Sunbird** *Nectarinia jugularis*.

MALAYSIA

Peninsular Malaysia

It is perhaps time to add a new feral member of the Sturnidae to the Malaysian list. Two **Asian Pied Starlings** *Sturnus contra* were seen with

Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* at Kepong Metropolitan Park, Jinjang Utara, 4 km from the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) on 5th March. On 7th March, five birds were found, including a juvenile (TO), and they were still present in the same area on 3rd July 2003. The species had previously been noted at Taman Kolam Takungan Banjir, Sungei Batu, Kuala Lumpur on 14th April 2002 (YKT), and there may be older records. There were two new records from Pulau Tioman (SR): a single **White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* at Tekek village on 12th March and a single (presumably escaped?), **White-rumped Munia** *Lonchura striata* at Paya village on 11th March. Other interesting sightings during the period under review included a single **Waterfall Swift** *Hydrochous gigas* reported from Panti Forest Reserve on 17th November (MD,LKC,SR), a single **Oriental Plover** *Charadrius veredus* at Mersing, Johor on 11th March (PB), and an **Aleutian Tern** *Sterna aleutica* at the Lima Islands, south of Tioman on 29th September 2002 (SR). A flock of c.105 **Pied Imperial Pigeons** *Ducula bicolor* at Melina Beach, Pulau Tioman on 21st April (SR) was a high count, and a flock of c.50 **Pin-tailed Parrotfinches** *Erythrura prasina* circling above High Pines Road, Fraser's Hill during the evenings of 12/13th June (MD,SR) was most unusual. A **Rusty-breasted Cuckoo** *Cacomantis sepulcralis* reported from Bukit Larut on 13th July 2003 (NCB,PSi,KK) was at the unusually high elevation of 1,115 m, whilst a flock of 23 **Tawny-breasted Parrotfinches** *Erythrura hyperythra*, 800 m along the Kuala Kubu Baru road from The Gap resthouse on 12th May (AT,CWM), were low. Significant breeding records included a dependent juvenile **Greater Yellownape** *Picus flavinucha* at Fraser's Hill on 5th August 2003 (CR *et al.*/Birdquest), a nest of **Oriental Honey-buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* at the Royal Perak Golf Club, Ipoh (CSC), which fledged a juvenile around the turn of the month January/February and then had the female already incubating another brood on 22nd February, the first Malaysian breeding record of **Black Eagle** *Ictinaetus malayensis*, with a single well-grown

chick in a nest, situated below the canopy of a c.18 m tall tree, at Pos Slim, Perak during 21st–23rd March (CSC, OBY, CKS), three young juvenile **Purple Herons** *Ardea purpurea* on a nest, and two other single juveniles at Kuala Selangor on 4th August 2003 (CR *et al.*/Birdquest), a dependent fledged young **Javan Cuckooshrike** *Coracina javensis* at Fraser's Hill on 5th August 2003 (CR *et al.*/Birdquest), a nest of **Scarlet Minivet** *Pericrocotus flammeus*, first found occupied on 16th March (CSC, CAL, LP, OBY), which hatched two young that were last observed on 13th April (OBY, CSC, NHK, CKaiS), a nest of **Asian Paradise-flycatcher** *Terpsiphone paradisi* still with young at Gunung Bubu Forest Reserve, Perak on 3rd August 2003 (LKCh, LSY, OBY), **Common Myna** feeding a fledged young **Asian Koel** *Eudynamis scolopacea* (a new host for the species or just a motherly myna?) at Buntong 2, Ipoh, Perak on 25th–27th April (LYL), a recently fledged young **Moustached Babbler** *Malacopteron magnirostre* at Taman Negara on 10th August 2003 (CR *et al.*/Birdquest), and an occupied nest of **Ruby-cheeked Sunbird** *Anthreptes singalensis* c.8 m above the ground at the NERC car park, Endau-Rompin, Johor on 4th April (NCB).

NEPAL

The only noteworthy record received was of up to eight **Finn's Weavers** *Ploceus megarhynchus* within the premises of Koshi Camp on 28th and a single bird on 31st October (HC, SGC, BCh, KB); the first from this area.

PHILIPPINES

The most interesting recent record was of a male **Snowy-browed Flycatcher** *Ficedula hyperythra* at the well-known **Cebu Flowerpecker** *Dicaeum quadricolor* location on Cebu on 10th January (YPEC, PC); apparently a new resident species for the island. Three interesting vagrants were also reported: Two **Fork-tailed Swifts** *Apus pacificus* at Picop, Mindanao on 13th January (YP), an **Oriental Pratincole** *Glareola maldivarum* near Cagayan del Oro, at the foot of Mount Kitanglad on 19th January (YP), and two **Forest Wagtails** *Dendronanthus indicus* at Mount Makiling, Luzon on 26th December (YPEC, PC).

RUSSIA

Two **Saunders's Gulls** *Larus saundersi* were found at De Friz Bay near Vladivostok on 29th May (NR/Birdquest). There are only a handful of previous Russian records. The same observer

reported an excellent total of 173 **Scaly-sided Mergansers** *Mergus squamatus* along a 20 km stretch of the Iman River in Primorye. This river system is one of the major breeding areas for the species, and the figure represents a significant proportion of the estimated population in this region. All were adults, mostly in flocks, except for a group of 16 one-week-old chicks tended by one or two females (probably two broods).

SINGAPORE

A single **Waterfall Swift** *Hydrochous gigas*, a potential first for Singapore, was reported from MacRitchie North-West on 19th November (JB, MP, SR). A female **Chestnut-cheeked Starling** *Sturnus philippensis* reported from Sungei Mandai on 23rd March (TPL, TJL, YYS) would be the second record if accepted. New records for Pulau Tekong were a male **Blue-breasted Quail** *Coturnix chinensis*, a single **Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*, and a **Rusty-rumped Warbler** *Locustella certhiola* at Pulau Tekong Besar on 9th April (JG, RKO, SR), and two adult and one immature **Red-wattled Lapwings** *Vanellus indicus* at Pulau Tekong Besar on 5th March (JG, RKO, SR) and 9th April (JG, RKO, SR). A single **Banded Woodpecker** *Picus mineaceus* on 19th April (SSu, ShS, SR) and another heard on 30th May (SR), and a male **Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot** *Loriculus galgulus* on 23rd January (SR), were both firsts for Pulau Sentosa. Vagrants during the period under review included a **Large Hawk Cuckoo** *Hierococcyx sparveroides* at Marina South on 10th November (NS, MS, SR) and 16th February (CKC), perhaps the third record, single **Oriental Cuckoos** *Cuculus saturatus* at Sungei Buloh Wetlands Reserve on 30th September 2002 (ABr, DB, SR) and MacRitchie North-West on 18th December (SL, SR), a sub-adult **Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx basalis* at Changi Central on 11th (EP, SR) and 17th (MH, DH, SR) August 2002, a single **Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* at Changi Central on 8th October (BC, ChSC, SR), a sub-adult **Short-toed Snake Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus* at Sungei Buloh WR on 22nd September 2002 (MB, SR), a **Besra** *Accipiter virgatus* at MacRitchie North-West on 12th October (PP, SR), a pale morph **Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus* at Neo Tiew Lane 2 on 2nd March (SMA, HHC, LKK, LKS, LBW, YYS), an adult **Blyth's Hawk Eagle** *Spizaetus alboniger* reported from Mount Faber on 3rd February (WF), the fourth recent record, a female **Japanese Paradise-flycatcher** *Terpsiphone atrocaudata* at Sime Rode on 23rd February (LKK, LKS, SY), the third Singapore record, a single **Streaked Bulbul** *Ixos malaccensis* at the summit,



Yellow-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua sulphurea* (top), photo by Rosemary Low and Flores Green Pigeon *Treron floris* (left), photo by Colin Trainer. Flores Green Pigeon is endemic to Nusa Tenggara while the cockatoo – formerly numerous throughout the region – is now extinct on many islands and close to extinction on many others having undergone an extremely rapid decline, due mainly to trapping for the pet trade (see ATO Indonesia, p. 81)

Bukit Timah Nature Reserve on 28th November (SR), and a **Two-barred Warbler** *Phylloscopus (t.) plumbeitarsus* at Marina South on 10th November (NS,MS,SR). Two **Vinous-breasted Starlings** *Sturnus burmannicus* were at Pulau Ubin on 5th January (GK,LKC,LW,SR). A single **Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica* at Neo Tiew Lane 2 on 9th March (LBW) was the first spring record. The sighting of a single **Great-billed Heron** *Ardea sumatrana* at Changi Creek on 26th March (NM,SR) was the first from the north coast of the main island since 1978, and a record of two birds at Beting Beronok on 19th June (SR *et al.*) is the first of more than a single bird in northern Singapore. Large flocks of **Purple-backed Starlings** *Sturnus sturninus*, totalling c.1,500 birds, were observed moving over MacRitchie north-west on 30th September 2002 (ABr,DB,SR). Noteworthy breeding records included nest-holes of a **Collared Kingfisher** *Todirhamphus chloris* in an arboreal termite nest c.10 m up in a tree at Pasir Ris Drive 3 on 14th March (WLK), an occupied nest-hole of **Javan Myna** *Acridotheres javanicus* near Mandai Orchid Garden on 26th March (OKS), a nest of **Yellow-vented Bulbul** *Pycnonotus goiavier* being built at 0.5 m above the ground in a fern at SBWR on 2nd March (BWC), a pair of **Olive-backed Sunbirds** *Nectarinia jugularis* building a nest 10–12 m up in a tree at Toh Tuck Road on 18th March (ASo), **Streaked Weaver**

Ploceus manyar collecting nest material at Marina East on 9th February (LKC), and an occupied nest of **Javan Munia** *Lonchura leucogastroides* at Tengah Air Base in March (GC).

THAILAND

Noteworthy galliform records were **Rain Quail** *Coturnix coromandelianus* at Bang Phra, Siracha District, Chonburi on 25th May (NT), and **Siamese Fireback** *Lophura diardi* at Phu Jong Na Yoi National Park, Ubon Ratchathani on 2nd August 2003 (DP,AR,KS,WS). Single **White-bellied Woodpeckers** *Dryocopus javensis* were found at Ko Pratong, Phang-nga on 9th February (WS), and Ko Surin on 3rd May (BBC,SRu). Six **Plain-pouched Hornbills** *Aceros subruficollis* were identified near Khuan Sai Toei, Ban Bang Tieo, Krabi on 16th May (NT). Further north, a **Rufous-collared Kingfisher** *Actenoides concretus* was seen in forest inland from Yangchum Lake, Kuiburi, Prachuap Khiri Khan on 1st August 2003 (DD,Mda). A colony of several thousand pairs of **Blue-tailed Bee-eaters** *Merops philippinus* was

- 1 Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*. Photo by Steve Bird/Birdseekers.
- 2 Grey-headed Fish Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyæetus*. Photo by Steve Bird/Birdseekers.

Both species regularly feature in From the Field.



discovered along Highway 42 in Tak Bai District, Narathiwat on 27th March (RK) and another colony of possibly up to 40 pairs, some with chicks, was found at Ko Pratong during April (WS). Small numbers of this species were also seen on Phuket during summer 2002 (DE), and it has now been recorded there in every month. A **Chestnut-winged Cuckoo** *Clamator coromandus* at Mahidol University Salaya Campus, Nakhon Pathom on 28th June (PR) was an unexpected record, since this is outside the normal passage season, and it is not thought to breed in this part of C Thailand. **Moustached Hawk Cuckoo** *Hierococcyx vagans* was reported from forest inland of Yangchum Lake on 1st August 2003 (DD,MDa), while **Rusty-breasted Cuckoo** *Cacomantis sepulcralis* was reported from Phang-nga town on 6th May (PE). A male **Grey-headed Parakeet** *Psittacula finschii* at km 8, Kaeng Krachan NP on 20th February 2003 (UT) was a considerable southward range extension. Five **White-throated Needletails** *Hirundapus caudacutus* at Kaeng Krachan on 13th March (DF) were new for the park list, and two more were seen on 26th April. **Silver-backed Needletails** *H. cochinchinensis* were also found here, with a single bird on 14th March (DF), and two on 26th April (AR,WS,KSo). A **Red Collared Dove** *Streptopelia tranquebarica* at Ko Pratong on 12th February (WS) was to the south of its usual range. A **Little Cuckoo Dove** *Macropygia ruficeps* flew past in mixed deciduous woodland, an unusual habitat for the species, in the foothills at Nong Ya Plong Hot Springs, Phetchaburi on 2nd August 2003 (PR). The prize pigeon of the period under review however, was a male **Cinnamon-headed Pigeon** *Treron fulvicollis* at Ko Pratong on 11th April (WS); the first confirmed record in Thailand for over 50 years, further underscoring the importance of this locality for a range of nationally and/or globally threatened species. **Black-tailed Crane** *Porzana bicolor* was reported from Fern Resort (c.300 m elevation), Mae Hong Son by WH (per MM) on 18th April. This is the fourth locality for Thailand, and seemingly at a much lower elevation than any of the previous ones. A single **Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata* flying south over Muniti Maharat, Pathumthani on 9th August 2003 (PE) was an unusual inland record, and three **Common Redshanks** *Tringa totanus* photographed at Mae Hia, Chiang Mai on 4th September 2003 (CK) were apparently the first to be recorded from NW Thailand. Other good wader records were two **Ruddy Turnstones** *Arenaria interpres* on Hin Kong, Ko Surin on 21st March (PK), two **Eurasian Thick-knees** *Burhinus oedipnemus* at Ban Pong

Salong Tha Yang District, Phetchaburi on 15th June (PE), a pair of **Beach Thick-knees** *Esacus neglectus* showing distraction behaviour on Mu Ko Surin on 3rd May (BBC,SRu), two **Red-wattled Lapwings** *Vanellus indicus* at Pha Taem, Ubon on 5th August 2003 (DP,AR,KS,WS), and four **Oriental Pratincoles** *Glareola maldivarum* flying south over the summit of Doi Inthanon on 4th May (AR,WS). **Pomarine Jaeger** *Stercorarius pomarinus* was observed following a flock of **White-winged Terns** *Chlidonias leucopterus* off Prachuap Khiri Khan on 8th May (PE). A breeding plumage **River Tern** *Sterna aurantia* was seen at Pasak Cholasit Dam, Lop Buri on 3rd August 2003 (SW) but was not present on 5th August 2003 when searched for by STh. This is only the second record of this near-extirpated riverine sandbar breeder in the past decade, making a grand total of three central plains records, all of which were in the wet season. A single adult **Roseate Tern** *S. dougallii* was photographed with **Black-naped Terns** *S. sumatrana* at Ko Stok, one of the Mu Ko Surin group, on 2nd May (BBC,SRu). An **Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* at Palan Sua Reservoir, inside Phu Jong Na Yoi National Park, Ubon Ratchathani during 30th–31st July 2003 (DP,AR,KS,WS) was good from a distributional point of view. A record of two **Black Bazas** *Aviceda leucophotes* near the headquarters of Khao Soi Dao Wildlife Sanctuary on 26th–27th June (DP,AR,KS,WS) is surely indicative of breeding there, and the sighting of another near the headquarters of Khao Yai National Park on 20th–22nd June (DP,AR,KS,WS) marks the second successive year with a breeding season record from the park. Elsewhere, in the Phanom Dongrak range in Ubon Ratchathani Province, **Black Bazas** were reported from Yot Dom (one on 1st August 2003), Phu Jong Na Yoi (five on 2nd August 2003), and Buntharik-Yot Mon Wildlife Sanctuary (two on 3rd August 2003; DP,AR,KS,WS). Over 3,000 **Black Bazas** passed north over Ban Laem, Phetchaburi on 23rd March (MM); the largest single spring count ever, and made in less than two hours in the middle of the day. Two **Brahminy Kites** *Haliastur indus* at Huai Ta Kao, in Huai Thab Than-Huai Samran Wildlife Sanctuary, Surin on 30th–31st July 2003 (DP,AR,KS,WS) were noteworthy, as were records of **Grey-headed Fish Eagle** *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus* from Ko Pratong, with an adult in the vicinity of an old nest on 10th February, and a juvenile catching fish at a small pond in *Melaleuca* woodland on 12th February (WS). A single **Chinese Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter soloensis* was seen at Doi Phu Kha, Nan on 22nd April, and there were five over Doi Ang Khang, Chiang Mai on

23rd April (ACo,MDu,PR). Five **Rufous-winged Buzzards** *Butastur liventer* at Pha Taem, Ubon on 5th August 2003 (DP,AR,KS,WS) were of distributional interest, as were **Rufous-bellied Eagle** *Hieraaetus kienerii* and **Osprey** in Khu Khan District, Huai Sala Wildlife Sanctuary, Si Saket on 31st July 2003 (DP,AR,KS,WS). A presumed resident **Mountain Hawk Eagle** *Spizaetus nipalensis* was seen perched near Khlong E-Thao, Khao Yai on 17th May (GG,AP,PR). A **Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus* at Ko Pratong on 10th April (WS) was well south. Single **Peregrine Falcons** *F. peregrinus* showing the characteristics of the race *peregrinator* were seen killing and eating **Spotted Doves** *Streptopelia chinensis* at Mae Hia, Chiang Mai on 23rd June (RK), and near Yangchum Lake on 30th June–2nd August 2003 (MDa). Huai Ta Kao, in Huai Thab Than-Huai Samran WS, a previously undocumented wetland site, held no fewer than 19 **Darters** *Anhinga melanogaster*, four **Indian Cormorants** *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*, and eight **Great Cormorants** *P. carbo* (overspill from the Cambodian breeding population?) when visited on 30th–31st July 2003 (DP,AR,KS,WS). Another **Darter** was seen at Palan Sua Reservoir, inside Phu Jong Na Yoi National Park, Ubon Ratchathani during the same period, and other singles were seen at Srinagarind Dam, Kanchanaburi on 15th June (AS,PT,KY) and Phasak Cholasit Dam, Lop Buri on 31st July 2003 (AN). A new nesting colony of **Indian Cormorants** was also found at Khok Kham, Samut Sakhon during July 2003 (RJ). A single **Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea* at Thalang, Phuket on 30th July 2003 (DE) was unusual (it is not known to breed on the island). There were seven **Chinese Egrets** *Egretta eulophotes* at Laem Pakarang, Phang-nga on 21st March (ST). **Javan Pond Heron** *Ardeola speciosa* was seen at Laguna,

Phuket on 21st March (IS), while a breeding plumage **Indian Pond Heron** *A. grayii* was photographed at Huai Yang, Prachuap Khiri Khan on 6th April (PE). Three or four **Javan Pond Herons** and a single **Indian Pond Heron** were also reported from the Phuket Recycling Centre on 26th April (IS), with another **Indian Pond Heron** at Prachuap Khiri Khan on 8th May (PE). A single **Von Schrenck's Bittern** *Ixobrychus eurhythmus* on Ko Surin on 4th May (BBC,SRu). Brief excitement was occasioned by a **Greater Flamingo** *Phoenicopterus ruber* which showed up on flooded salt-pans at Khok Kham, Samut Sakhon on 2nd July 2003 (SD,RJ *et al.*); though it had presumably escaped from captivity. All the primaries and secondaries appeared equally fresh, as if they had recently grown simultaneously, yet most of the secondaries on the right wing were missing, as if clipped. One seen near Laem Phak Bia on 9th August 2003 may have been the same bird (PR,KS,SSut,NU). There were 25 free-flying **Spot-billed Pelicans** *Pelecanus philippensis* and eleven nestlings at Dusit Zoo, Bangkok on 27th April 2003 (JM). There were 11 **Spot-billed Pelicans**, five **Black-headed Ibises** *Threskiornis melanocephalus* and 60 **Painted Storks** *Mycteria leucocephala* at Wat Khao Takhrao, Phetchaburi on 8th August 2003 (MM), and at least 110 **Painted Storks** on salt-pans at Laem Phak Bia on 9th August 2003 (PR,KS,SSut,NU). Ponds near Wat Khao Takhrao held 204 **Painted Storks** (>90% adults) and 23 **Spot-billed Pelicans** on 24th August 2003 (PR,NU), a single **Milky Stork** on 31st August 2003 (DL,NU), and a **Milky Stork** and 56 **Spot-billed Pelicans** on 7th September 2003 (MM). Bung Boraphet, Nakhon Sawan held three **Darters**, three **Spot-billed Pelicans**, six **Painted Storks** and 11 **Glossy Ibises** *Plegadis falcinellus* on 9th March (STh) and apparently 21 **Glossy Ibises** on 14th March (ST). Five **Lesser Adjutants** *Leptoptilos javanicus* were seen over Muniti Maharat, Pathumthani on 27th April (PE), but were they genuinely wild, or loose birds from Safari World? The highest count of **Lesser Adjutants** on Ko Pratong was 16 on 8th April (WS). A male **Giant Pitta** *Pitta caerulea* was seen at km 17, Kaeng Krachan on 19th February (UT), two were heard calling at km 16 on 1st–3rd June (MG), and a male was photographed and a second bird (a presumed female) heard calling nearby, on 27th June (SKI). At least 10 **Red-billed Blue Magpies** *Urocissa erythrorhyncha*, including some juveniles were seen at Phutthamonthon, Nakhon Pathom on 5th May (MR,WS). At least three **House Crows** *Corvus splendens* were feeding at the Phuket Recycling Centre on 26th April (IS); it



Black Baza *Aviceda leuphotes*. By Craig Robson (courtesy of Birdquest).

seems that this unwelcome nest-predator is gaining a significant foothold in the south. A short-tailed fledgling **Black-naped Oriole** *Oriolus chinensis*, with an adult in attendance, at Mahidol University, Bangkok on 13th May (PR), provides firm evidence of the breeding of this species in C Thailand. A **Crow-billed Drongo** *Dicrurus annectans* was reported from Kaeng Krachan on 12th July 2003 (ST). **Lesser Shortwing** *Brachypteryx leucophrys* feeding fledged young at Doi Pu Kha, Nan on 24th April (ST) provided a good new distributional record. A fresh-plumaged **Asian Brown Flycatcher** *Muscicapa dauurica* at Nong Ya Plong Not Springs on 2nd August 2003 (PR) was thought to be of the resident (or short-distance migrant?) race *siamensis*. A second individual, a first-year, was at Laem Phak Bia on 10th August 2003 (PR,PS). A pair of **Brown-breasted Flycatchers** *M. muttui* were present in the Hup Massa Jan gully, Mae Puh, Doi Ang Khang on 20th April (UT *et al.*) and 22nd April (ACo,MDa,PR), and breeding was suspected. **Ferruginous Flycatcher** *M. ferruginea* at Mahidol University Salaya Campus on 22nd March (APi,PR) was perhaps the first documented record from C Thailand. A single male **Mugimaki Flycatcher** *Ficedula mugimaki* was seen at Phu Soi Dao, Uttaradit on 29th April (ST), and there was a male **Blue-and-white Flycatcher** *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* on Ko Surin on 23rd March (PK). A pair of **Mangrove Blue Flycatchers** *Cyornis rufigastra* in the mangroves at Chai Pattana Foundation in Yaring, Pattani on 27th March (RK) provided the first ever east-coast record. **Pygmy Blue Flycatcher** *Muscicapella hodgsoni* (one male and one or two females) were discovered at km 19.5, Kaeng Krachan, on 24th April (AR,WS,KSo). **Chestnut-cheeked Starling** *Sturnus philippensis* was again seen at the Municipal Sports Ground, Chumphon, along with 100 **Purple-backed Starlings** *S. sturninus* on 13th March (CN). A flock of no fewer than 17 **Rosy Starlings** *S. roseus* was found roosting in coconut palms at Sam Phraya Beach, Khao Sam Roi Yot, Prachuap Khiri Khan, on 27th March (ACol). A **Brahminy Starling** *S. pagodarum* was also seen nearby on 28th March (ACol). A remarkable nine **Beautiful Nuthatches** *Sitta formosa* were seen on Doi Dong Ya Wai, Doi Phu Kha during 23rd–25th April (ST) and about the same number one week later, when they were feeding fledged young (CK,RK,SK *et al.*). A report of **Black-throated Tit** *Aegithalos concinnus* nest-building near the Mae Uam Watershed Station, km 35, Doi Inthanon on 7th April (ST) would, if accepted, be a new site record. A singing **Brown Bush Warbler** *Bradypterus luteoventris* was tape-

recorded at Doi Ang Khang on 20th April (UT). A single **Black-throated Laughingthrush** *Garrulax chinensis* and three **Greater Necklaced Laughingthrushes** *G. pectoralis* were seen at Phutthamonthol on 5th May (MR,WS). **House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus* was reported from Aranyapreathet, Sa Kaeo on 21st June. (PJ,NN), and a **Tiger Shrike** *Lanius tigrinus* in adult plumage at Kaeng Krachan on 19th July 2003 (PS) was doubly unusual; being about three weeks earlier than the previous earliest, and in addition, not yet undergoing its post-breeding moult. At Bang Pu, Samut Prakan there were no fewer than 23 **Grey-tailed Tattlers** *Heteroscelus brevipes* at the high tide roost on 10th May (MM) and an even more remarkable 27 on 15th May (AL). There was also a high count of at least 70 **Eurasian Thick-knees** at the usual site at Pong Salot, Phetchaburi on 24th (PR,NU) and 31st (DL,NU) August 2003. The discovery of a nest of **Rusty-naped Pitta** *Pitta oatesi*, containing three small young, at km 18, Kaeng Krachan NP (only 300 m elevation) on 27th July 2003 (per SKI), provided a new low altitude record for the species in SE Asia. New data was provided by the following breeding records: **Scaly-breasted Partridge** *Arborophila chloropus* incubating at Kaeng Krachan on 25th May (ST) and 8th June (per SKI), a **Rufous Piculet** *Sasia abnormis* feeding young in a nest at To Mo, Bala Sector, Hala-Bala Wildlife Sanctuary, Narathiwat on 3rd May (ST), a **Collared Scops Owl** *Otus bakkamoena* incubating two eggs in a hole in a Melaleuca tree (1.3 m above the ground) at Ko Pratong in March (WS,AR), **Pheasant-tailed Jacanas** *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* incubating or brooding, and elsewhere with two nearly full-grown chicks, at Ban Chalerm Prakiat, Samut Songkhram on 24th August 2003 (PR,NU), **Bat Hawk** *Macheiramphus alcinus* incubating at Bala during 25th–27th March (RK), a recently fledged juvenile **White-bellied Sea Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucogaster*, still with some down, at Yangchum Lake on 5th July 2003 (DD,MDa), an incubating **Blyth's Hawk Eagle** *S. alboniger* at Samnak Song, Bala on 6th May (ST), a nest of **Crested Jay** *Platylophus galericulatus* with two c. 8–10 days old young, at Kaeng Krachan NP on 29th June (PE), providing the first documentation from SE Asia?, two recently fledged young **Large Woodshrikes** *Tephrodornis gularis* at Sakaerat, Nakhon Ratchasima on 14th June (ST), a female **Purple Cochoa** *Cochoa purpurea* carrying nest material at Doi Inthanon during 6th–7th April (ST), **Beautiful Nuthatch** feeding a single fledged youngster at Doi Pu Kha on 25th April, a **Slaty-bellied Tesia** *Tesia olivea* nest-building at km 38, Doi Inthanon

NP on 16th May (ST), apparently the first documentation for this species, a male **White-browed Shortwing** *Brachypteryx montana* feeding a juvenile and a female entering a nest at Doi Inthanon on 6th August 2003 (AN), and **Pygmy Wren Babbler** *Pnoepyga pusilla* carrying food for young at Doi Inthanon on 10th August 2003 (KW).

VIETNAM

Giant Ibis *Pseudibis gigantea* has been rediscovered in Vietnam at Yok Don National Park, Dak Lak. Two were observed feeding at a small forest wetland in the central part of the park on 6th March (HQQ, JE), before flying off westwards towards Cambodia. These are the first sightings in Vietnam since 1931, when the species was encountered in Binh Phuoc Province. Also of great significance were two **Black-necked Storks** *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* seen at the same place on 7th March, and a single **White-winged Duck** *Cairina scutulata* in the park on 19th March 2003 (JE). Further south, there was more exciting large waterbird news, with the sighting of four adult **Milky Storks** *Mycteria cinerea* at Tri Su Mangroves, c. 5 km from Chau Doc, on the road to Nha Bang, An Giang Province on 3rd May (HS). A visit to Deo Loxo (Lo Xo Pass), along Highway 14, between Da Nang and Kontum on 11th–12th January (GR), turned up five apparent new records for Central Annam: **Black-browed Barbet** *Megalaima oorti*, **Mountain Hawk Eagle** *Spizaetus nipalensis*, **Flavescent Bulbul** *Pycnonotus flavescens*, **Mountain Tailorbird** *Orthotomus cuculatus*, and **Buff-throated Warbler** *Phylloscopus subaffinis*.

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Around the Orient

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Bhutan

Second-ever nest of White-bellied Heron

A nest of White-bellied Heron *Ardea imperialis* – the rarest heron in the world – has been discovered in Bhutan and pictures of the nesting pair plus their nestling can be seen online on the Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) website. The RSPN initiated a two-year study of this endangered heron in spring 2003 and amazingly a nest was discovered within two weeks – only the second ever found (the first was in Myanmar).

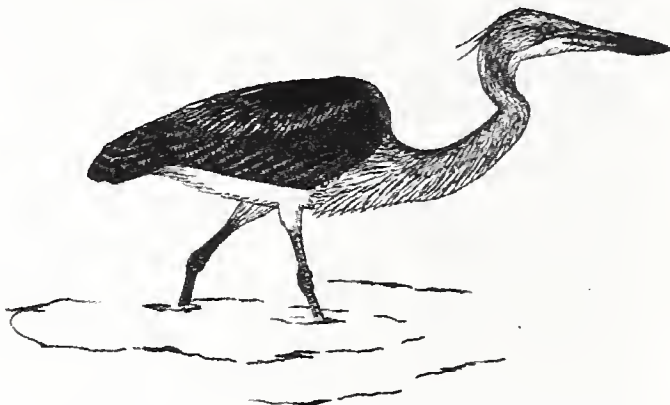
Source: RSPN <www.rspn-bhutan.org/projects.htm>

fewer than 100 chicks, the reason being a continuous drought in Inner Mongolia since 1998 that has severely shrunk the lake.

Despite protests, the lake has been developed as a tourist resort with speedboats and pedalboats etc. The gulls' breeding season unfortunately coincides with the tourist season. The national park recently requested 8 million yuan for conservation from the National Forestry Bureau, but was unsuccessful.

Source: Michael Rank/*Oriental Birding* newsgroup, 10 August 2003

(For more info on Relict Gulls see the article on page 41 – eds.)



White-bellied Heron *Ardea insignis*.
By Hil Bruinsma.

million cubic feet of water required to keep the wetland flooded. The resultant grassland has been exploited by local villagers grazing their cattle. Waterfowl breeding populations have plummeted and the severe drought threatens the survival of the remnant wintering population of Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus*.

Col. Shyam Singh, the honorary wildlife warden at Bharatpur, made this grim prediction in December 2002: 'In the absence of specific preventative action, in five years time Keoladeo National Park will be an area of dry grassland overgrazed by cast-off domestic cattle whilst villagers destroy the remaining trees for firewood and collect grass as forage for their productive domestic animals'. (For an interesting history of Bharatpur – and how it featured in the *Ramayana* – see the *Deccan Herald*, 27 July 2003 <www.deccanherald.com/deccanherald/july27/sh1.asp>)

Sources: OBC Factsheet/*Oriental Birding*, 16 September 2003)

China

Many more Relict Gulls

The Relict Gull *Larus relictus* population at Hongjian Nur lake in Shaanxi province in central China is much higher than previously known. The *Shaanxi Daily* reported on July 20, 2003 that there were 2,000 Relict Gulls at Hongjian Nur, compared with (only) "over 100" according to *Threatened birds of Asia*.

Similarly, WWF China report that in the Ramsar reserve at Taolishan-Alashan Nur, the number of nests has risen from 581 in 1990 to over 3,500 in 1998. But since 1999 the hatching rate has declined, and this year only about 1,000 birds arrived, building only about 300 nests, and hatching

India

Water rationing threatens Bharatpur

It is now more than a century since Bharatpur was declared a reserve. But there were no celebrations at the centenary in 2002 because the most famous wetland in Asia is dying of thirst. Following four years of drought, the monsoon rains in 2003 were far better – but now the Keoladeo Ghana National Park, a World Heritage Site, faces water rationing by its neighbours.

A new barrage commissioned in 2000 regulates the water flow in local rivers – and local people and their politicians have argued that the national park should not receive the 500

Keechan Demoiselle Cranes come home

The first flock of 200

Demoiselle Cranes

Anthropoides virgo arrived in the tiny desert village of Keechan on 28 August 2003. This bird-friendly village in western Rajasthan 'invites' these charismatic birds every year with great reverence and fervour.

The villagers have a fenced, open enclosure which serves as a feeding area. At peak time, Keechan can pay host to more than 10,000 Demoiselles. All these wild birds are fed daily with corn supplied entirely by the villagers' collective efforts.

Source: N. Shiva Kumar / *Oriental Birding*, 12 September 2003

Indonesia

Environmentalists worry about war impact on Aceh's forests

Indonesian environmentalists have expressed concerns over the re-imposition of martial law in Aceh, home of Leuser National Park. 'We are worried about the army going into the forest, stealing the timber and endangered species as they are doing now in Papua,' said Hasjrul Junaid, spokesman for The Indonesian NGO Network for Forest Conservation (Skephi). The park covers 2.7 million hectares of rich, largely pristine forest and is home to endangered species such as the Sumatran tiger, rhino and elephant.

It remains unclear whether Aceh's governor Abdullah Puteh – under investigation for corruption before the declaration of martial law – will be allowed to push through his project to build a

highway through the middle of the park. The project would be the end of Leuser, and lead to the E.U. cutting off aid to the park. 30 million euros were recently pledged to preserve the park and set up a workable management system for it.

Source: Indonesian Nature Conservation List 6–21, 25 May 2003

Australian hypocrisy over mining in forests

Twenty-two mining companies, include some of Australia's biggest corporations like BHP Billiton and Newcrest, have applied for permission to mine in Indonesia's national parks. The Australian government has been lobbying for over a year, behind the scenes, to undermine existing environmental protections at several sites in eastern Indonesia.

Australians have a high level of concern for the environment and firmly choose to keep Australian protected areas protected instead of mining them. The jarring note struck by the pro-mining, anti-environment lobbying by Australian embassy officials is a betrayal of Australian public sentiments.

Proposed plans include Placer Dome's open cut gold mine in a protected forest area in South Kalimantan's Meratus Mountains, while BHP-Billiton has begun work on a huge nickel mine on Gag Island in Papua province.

Sources: *Jakarta Post*, 3 July 2003/Mines and Communities website <www.minesandcommunities.org/Country/indonesia6.htm>

Two thirds of biodiversity hotspots on holiday isles are unprotected

A total of 63% of the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in the Indonesian provinces of East and West Nusa Tenggara, including the tourist mecca of Lombok, have absolutely no protection, a new study *Important Bird Areas of Nusa Tenggara* by BirdLife International reveals.

The increasingly deforested islands are home to 40 endemic birds and new species, such as Sumba Owl *Ninox sumbaensis*, are still being discovered. Unprotected IBAs on Flores are home to four threatened endemic bird species (as well as Komodo Dragons) including Flores Scops Owl *Otus alfredi*, which has only been recorded a few times in one small area over the last 150 years, while nearby Sumba and Komodo support important populations of Yellow-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua sulphurea*, among others (see page 74 for photos).

BirdLife is currently involving local communities in managing the valuable Mbeliling forest area on Flores and developing sustainable economic activities within it. The area supports important populations of Flores Hanging-parrot *Loriculus flosculus* and Flores Crow *Corvus florensis*, plus the principal population of the Flores Monarch, and is the richest area for restricted-range species on the island.

Source: BirdLife International news release, 17 September 2003

Kukila Volumes 12 & 13

Kukila is the journal of the Indonesian Ornithological Society. Volume 12 is now available, sporting a new (colour) cover and larger format than previous issues. This is the first *Kukila* since the death of Derek Holmes, its founding editor. It's packed

with goodies, including articles on rare endemics of Sulawesi, new records for Nusa Tenggara and Irian Jaya, breeding seasons in Timor and more. Volume 13 is expected by the end of 2003, and will be largely devoted to the Important Bird Areas of Sumatra and Kalimantan. Please show your support for this worthwhile journal. For information on subscriptions and previous issues, E-mail: kukila@pili.or.id Website: www.pili.or.id/pili.

Japan

Swinhoe's Rail breeding in northern Japan ?

Delegates at the September meeting of Ornithological Society of Japan in Hirosaki City were surprised to read in the local newspaper that a potential breeding colony of 11 Swinhoe's Rail *Coturnicops exquisitus* had been found (photos taken and sound recorded) at Hotoke-numa in July. The area is also one of the last breeding sites of the equally threatened Marsh Grassbird *Locustella pryeri* in Japan.

If you can read Japanese, see the following website (even if you can't read Japanese, there's an excellent photo of the bird): www.kahoku.co.jp/news/2003/09/20030919t25019.htm

For more information about Swinhoe's Rail, see the website of *Threatened birds of Asia*:

www.rdb.or.id/view_html.php?id=253&op=cotuexqu

Source: Simba Chan/*Oriental Birding*, 23 September 2003

Pakistan

Vulture 'virus' could be poisoning

Gyps vultures have declined by more than 90% across India within the last 10 years. In recent years the declines have spread to Pakistan and Nepal. They have taken place across all regions and habitats, including both protected and unprotected areas. No other scavenging species have undergone a similar crash. The actual cause of the declines has been difficult to pin down although one frequent finding in dead vultures has been the presence of severe gout. In an exciting development researchers have found that birds with gout from three Pakistani colonies had high levels of an anti-inflammatory painkilling drug Diclofenac in their kidneys. The drug, used in human medicine for decades, has been used in veterinary medicine in India and Pakistan in recent years. Vultures could have been exposed to the drug through scavenging livestock carcasses containing residues. Although the results of work in India remain more suggestive of an infectious disease, they do not discount the possibility of a

toxin being the cause of the declines, either in part or in whole. Investigations into the role of the drug are continuing.

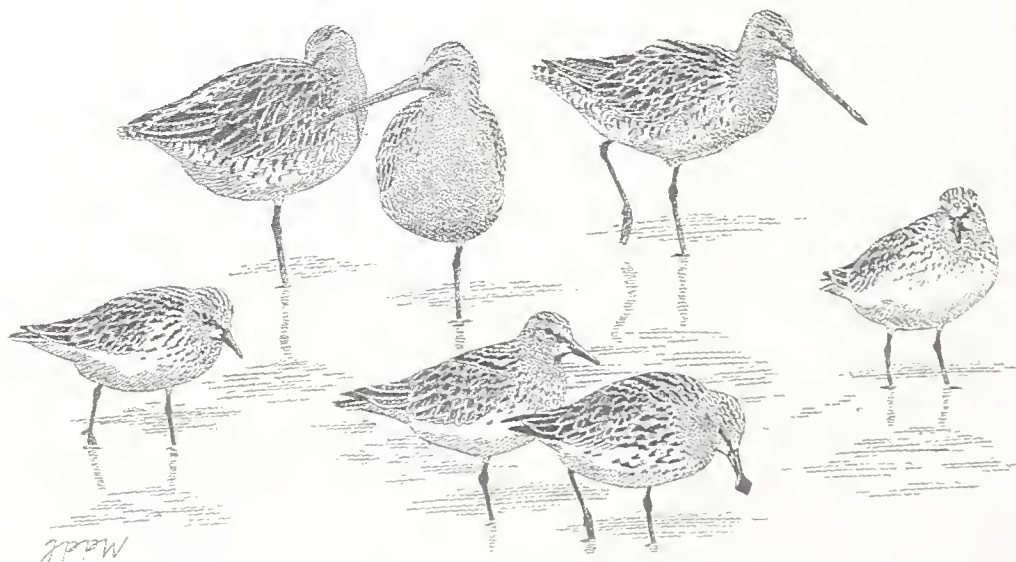
Sources: Debbie Pain, RSPB/*BBC Wildlife*, October 2003

Russia

More Spoon-billed Sandpipers

The 2003 Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmeus* expedition to South Chukotka found more pairs breeding there than previously thought. A total of 76 territories was identified and at least 38 nests or broods were found and no fewer than 60 pairs are supposed to breed in the area. 53 adult birds were colour-marked with a small green flag and about 85 young were ringed. At least 12 ringed chicks disappeared. Out of the 31 birds ringed during a shorter visit in 2001 only one bird – the only adult of the 31 birds – has been re-sighted (and found breeding only a few hundred metres from its ringing site).

With more than 200 colour-flagged birds it should be more likely to encounter the birds along the migration route.



Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmeus*, Red-necked Stints *Calidris ruficollis* and Asiatic Dowitchers *Limnodromus semipalmatus*. By Jan Wilczur.

However, only one recovery from Japan demonstrates the low observer density along the migration route. Stable isotope analyses of 29 feathers taken during the survey may shed light onto the mystery of the wintering grounds.

Source: Christoph Zockler, ArcCona Ecological Consulting, 23 September 2003

South Korea

SOS – Save Our Saemangeum

A magnificent lobbying campaign by Wetlands and Birds Korea has seen 6,400 birders from 76 countries sign an online petition by the end of September condemning the government reclamation scheme at Saemangeum. To add your name, go to: <www.wbkenglish.com/petition01.asp>

Nial Moores, Charlie Moores and Kim Sukyung of WBK should be congratulated for their sterling efforts to save Saemangeum and its special birds.

Source: Wetlands and Birds Korea <www.wbkenglish.com>

Saemangeum online

The dispute over the mudflats at Saemangeum is described in *Dyke Hard*, a film in the Earth Report series made by Television Trust for the Environment (TVE) and shown on BBC World. BBC NEWS ONLINE <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/3046368.stm>>

Source: Steve Rowland (For an up-to-date picture of the situation and a precis of recent events see the article on page 31 – eds)

Thailand

Road bridge plan for Gulf of Thailand

Government plans for a highway south of Bangkok, including a 50-kilometre road bridge cutting across the western edge of the Gulf of Thailand, have been denounced by environmentalists and coastal residents. Writing in the *Bangkok Post*, renowned ornithologist Phil Round says: '...the beauty of the Phetchaburi coast, and along with it much of the biodiversity of the upper Gulf in the neighbouring provinces of Samut Songkhram and Samut Sakhon, will be lost forever.'

It's believed that most of the entire world population of 20,000 Asian Dowitchers *Limnodromus semipalmatus* passes through, and feeds on, the mudflats. Khok Kham, in Samut Sakhon, draws two to four Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Calidris pygmeus* annually, and is a must-visit site for overseas birders. Local salt-farmers, who have established the Khok Kham Conservation Club, are now themselves keen birdwatchers and usually know to within one or two salt-pans exactly where the birds are at any given time among the hundreds other birds. The club has set up an information centre and receives and guides visiting foreign birdwatchers. You can read Phil Round's article online in two parts: <www.bangkokpost.com/en/240803_Outlook/24Aug2003_out01.html> <www.bangkokpost.com/en/240803_Outlook/24Aug2003_out02.html>

Source: *Bangkok Post*, 24 August 2003

Tibet

Two new Black-necked Crane reserves

China has granted two nature reserves in the Tibet Autonomous Region to protect the Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis*.

Covering more than 8,000 km², the reserves – along the middle reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo River – bring the number of state-level nature reserves in Tibet to seven.

Thanks to the effective measures that Tibet has taken to protect the cranes, the number of birds wintering in this south-western region has grown rapidly with more than 1,600 in Lhunzhub County in the winter of 2002/03, compared to 700 in 1992. It is estimated that about 4,200 cranes (of a world population of 5,000) spent the winter in Tibet.

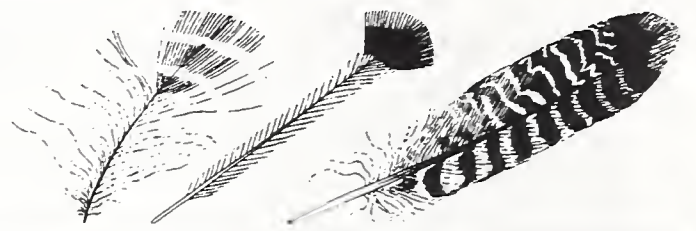
Source: *People's Daily*, 30 June 2003

Power giant to dam Tibetan holy lake

China Huaneng Group, China's largest independent power producer, has the go-ahead to dam a Tibetan holy lake. The company is controlled by Li Xiaopeng, son of the former prime minister Li Peng. Mugecuo Lake is in the heart of Ganzi district, in the Tibet Autonomous Region. Damming the lake would inundate a valley of incredible biological richness, dubbed by scientists a biodiversity 'hotspot'.

Source: Steve Rowland / *Sunday Telegraph*, 28 September 2003

Stray Feathers



Birds and traffic paper published

Johannes Erritzoe has written a paper entitled 'Bird traffic casualties and road quality for breeding birds – a summary of existing papers with a bibliography'. Due to the lengthy nature of the paper (42 pages), it has been published on the web (see below). It is the first time a summary of all ornithological papers on this serious problem has been written. The Zoological Record has never presented papers about traffic accidents. Nevertheless, approx. 300 articles in many languages have been collected. Some of

the most important works are in Danish and Swedish with little or no English abstract and therefore unknown to the English-speaking world. For more info contact Johannes Erritzoe, House of Bird Research, Taps Old Rectory, Oedisvej 43, Taps, DK-6070 Christiansfeld, Denmark Tel. +45 75 57 31 56, E-mail: erritzoe@altavista.net or www.birdresearch.dk.

Wild Republic on Courser

The manufacturer of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds's (U.K.) soft bird toys has supplied fieldworkers with 1,000 authentic recordings of

India's threatened Jerdon's Courser *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus* using the mechanism from the toys (without the toy bit) for research to establish the bird's current status in range and population.

Painting for Sale!

The watercolour of Courtois's Laughingthrush *Garrulax galbanus courtoisi* featured on page 40 is for sale. The plate measures 254 mm X 300 mm. The artist, Dave Showler, has generously agreed to donate half the proceeds to the OBC Conservation Fund. Please contact the Club in one of the usual ways with your offer.

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Guidelines for contributors

Whilst the Editor is always pleased to discuss possible contributions with potential authors, and to advise on preparation, it would be helpful if the following guidelines could be adhered to:

1. **Articles** These should be written clearly, preferably typed, on one side of the page, with all lines double-spaced, leaving wide margins, and should be no longer than 2,000 words. Scientific names should appear at the first mention of each species or, if all species appear in a table, they may be given there instead. Scientific names should, where possible, follow T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey and W. Duckworth (1996) *An annotated checklist of the birds of the Oriental Region*.

Any tables to accompany articles should be prepared on separate pieces of paper, and be thoroughly checked. Titles of tables should be self-explanatory. Diagrams should be clearly drawn, in ink, ideally 15 cm wide and 11 cm high. References should be cited in the order in which they appear during the paper in the same style used in this Bulletin.

It would be helpful if two copies of each contribution could be submitted, and also if possible the text submitted on a computer disk, ideally in Microsoft Word, in either PC or Macintosh format.

2. **From the field** These should follow the format in the current edition of the OBC Bulletin, and be sent to the Bulletin Editor, OBC, PO Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, UK.
3. **News/Information** Typed or handwritten contributions should be sent to the Bulletin Editor, OBC, PO Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, UK.

Although every effort is made to retain all articles in their submitted form, the Editorial Committee reserves the right to make changes that it deems necessary, and, in a minimum of cases, without prior reference to the author. It is assumed that all contributors submitting material understand and accept these conditions. All contributors, photographers and artists, in submitting material for the OBC Bulletin, also give permission for their work to be used in the OBC Internet pages.

For Around the Orient, Recently Published, Stray Feathers and Free Press, the deadline for submission of material is 28th February (Spring Bulletin) and 31st August (Autumn Bulletin). The deadlines do not apply to main articles which will be published as soon as possible after acceptance by the Editorial Committee.

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